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1817

CHANTECLER

CHANTECLER

A

CHANTECLER

PLAY IN FOUR ACTS

BY

EDMOND ROSTAND

TRANSLATED

BY

GERTRUDE HALL

NEW YORK
DUFFIELD AND COMPANY
1921

X 48
R84ch
+E8
1921

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DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

CHANTECLER
PATOU
THE BLACKBIRD
THE PEACOCK
THE NIGHTINGALE
THE GRAND-DUKE
THE SCREECH-OWL
LITTLE SCOPS
THE GAME-COCK
THE HUNTING DOG
A CARRIER-PIGEON
THE WOOD-PECKER
THE TURKEY
THE DUCK
THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK
THE PHEASANT-HEN
THE GUINEA-HEN
THE OLD HEN
THE WHITE HEN
THE GREY HEN
THE BLACK HEN
THE SPECKLED HEN
THE TUFTED HEN

A Gander. A Capon. Chickens. Chicks. A Cockerel. A Swan. A Cuckoo. Night-birds. Fancy Cocks. Toads. A Turkey-hen. A Goose. A Garden Warbler. A Woodland Warbler. A Spider. A Heron. A Pigeon. A Guinea-pig. Barnyard animals. Woodland Creatures. Rabbits. Birds. Bees. Cicadas. Voices.

PROLOGUE

The customary three knocks are heard. The drop-curtain wavers and is rising, when a voice rings out, "Not yet!" and the MANAGER, *a gentleman of important mien in evening dress, springing from his proscenium box, hurries toward the stage, repeating, "Not yet!"*

The curtain is again lowered. The MANAGER *turns toward the audience, and resting one hand on the prompter's box, addresses them:*

The curtain is a wall,—a flying wall. Assured that presently the wall will fly — why haste? Is it not charming to delay — and just look at it for a while?

Charming to sit before a great red wall, hanging beneath two gilt masks and a scroll — The thrilling moment is when the curtain thrills, and sounds come from the other side.

You are desired to-night to listen to those sounds and entering the scene before you see it, to wonder and surmise —

Bending his ear, the MANAGER *listens to the sounds now beginning to come from behind the curtain.*

A footstep — is it a road? A flutter of wings — is it a garden?

The curtain here rippling as if about to rise, the MANAGER *precipitately shouts, "Stop! —Do not raise it yet!" Then again bending his ear, continues making note of the noises, clear or confused, single or combined, that from this onward come without stop from behind the curtain.*

A magpie cawing flies away. Great wooden shoes come running over flags. A courtyard, is it? — If so above a valley — from whence that softened clamour of birds and barking dogs.

More and more clearly the scene suggests itself — Magically sound creates an atmosphere! — A sheep bell tinkles intermittently — Since there is grazing, we may look for grass.

A tree, too — a tree must rustle in the breeze, for a bullfinch warbles his little native song; and a blackbird whistling the song he has caught by ear, implies, we may presume, a wicker cage.

The rattling of a waggon run out of a shed — the dripping of a bucket drawn up overfull — the patter of doves' feet alighting on a roof — Surely it is a farmyard — unless it be a mill!

Rustling of straw, click of a wooden latch — A stable or a haymow there must be. The locust shrills: the weather then is fine. — Church-bells ring: it is Sunday then. — Chatter of jays: the woods cannot be far!

Hark! Nature with the scattered voices of a fair midsummer day is composing — in a dream! — the most mysterious of overtures — harmonised by evening, distance and the wind!

And all these sounds — song of a passing girl — laughter of children jogged by the donkey trotting — faraway gun-reports and hunting-horns — these sounds describe a holiday.

A window opens, a door closes — The harness shakes its bells. Is it not plain in sight, the old farmyard? — The dog sleeps, the cat but feigns to sleep.

Sunday! — Farmer and farmer's wife are starting for the fair. The old horse paws the ground ——

A Rough Voice

[*Behind the curtain, through the horse's pawing.*] Whoa, Dapple!

Another Voice

[*As if calling to a laggard.*] Come along! We shan't get home till morning!

An Impatient Voice

Are you ready?

Another Voice

Fasten the shutters!

Man's Voice

All right!

Woman's Voice

My sunshade!

Man's Voice

[*Through the cracking of the whip.*] Gee up!

The Manager

The waggon to the jingling of the harness rattles off, jolting out ditties. A turn in the road cuts off the unfinished song. — They are gone, quite gone. The performance can begin.

Some philosophers would say there was not a soul left, but we humbly believe that there are hearts. Man in leaving does not take with him all drama. One can laugh and suffer without him. [*He listens again.*]

Ardently humming, a velvety bumblebee hovers — then is still; he has plunged into a flower — Let us begin. Pray note that Æsop's hump to-night does duty as prompter's box!

The members of our company are small, but —— [*Calling toward the flies.*] Alexander! [*To the audience.*] He is my chief machinist. [*Calling again.*] Let it down!

A Voice

[*From the flies.*] It's coming, sir!

Manager

We have lowered between the audience and the stage an invisible screen of magnifying glass ——

But there the violins are tuning up: Scraping of crystal bows, picking of strings! — Hush! Let the footlights now leap into brightness, for at a signal from their little leader the crickets' orchestra have briskly fallen to!

Frrrt! The bumblebee emerges from the flower, shaking the yellow dust — A Hen comes on the scene as in La Fontaine's fable. A Cuckoo calls, as in Beethoven's symphony.

Hush! Let the chandelier draw in its myriad lights — for the curious call-boy of the woods has, airily, to summon us, repeated thrice his double call ——

And since Nature is one of our performers, and feathered notables are on our staff — Hush! the curtain must go up: A wood-pecker's bill has rapped out the three strokes!

ACT I

ACT FIRST

THE EVENING OF THE PHEASANT-HEN

A farmyard such as the sounds from behind the curtain have described. At the right, a house over-clambered with wistaria. At the left, the farmyard gate, letting on to the road. A dog-kennel. At the back, a low wall, beyond which distant country landscape. The details of the setting define themselves in the course of the act.

CHANTECLER

SCENE FIRST

The whole barnyard company, HENS, CHICKENS, CHICKS, DUCKS, TURKEYS, *etc.;* THE BLACKBIRD *in his cage,* THE CAT *asleep on the wall, later* A BUTTERFLY *on the flowers.*

THE WHITE HEN

[*Pecking.*] Ah! Delicious!

ANOTHER HEN

What are you eating?

ALL THE HENS

[*Rushing to the spot.*] What's she eating?

THE WHITE HEN

A small green beetle, crisp and nice, tasting of the rose-leaves he had lived on.

THE BLACK HEN

[*Standing before the* BLACKBIRD'S *cage.*] Really, the Blackbird whistles amazingly!

THE WHITE HEN

Any little street urchin can do as much!

THE TURKEY

[*Solemnly.*] An urchin who had learned of a shepherd in Sicily!

THE DUCK

He never whistles his tune to the end ——

THE TURKEY

That's too easy, carrying it to the end! (*He hums the tune the* BLACKBIRD *has been whistling.*) "How sweet to fare afield, and cull —— and cull ——" You should know, Duck, that the thing in art is to leave off before the end! "And cull —— and cull ——" Bravo, Blackbird!

[*The* BLACKBIRD *comes out on the little platform in front of his cage and bows.*]

A CHICK

[*Astonished.*] Can he get out?

BLACKBIRD

Applause is salt on my tail!

THE CHICK

But his cage?

THE TURKEY

He can come out, and he can go in again. His cage has that sort of spring. — "And cull —— and cull ——" The whole point is missed if you tell them what you cull!

THE BLACK HEN

[*Catching sight of a* BUTTERFLY *alighting on the flowers above the wall at the back.*] Oh, what a gorgeous butterfly!

THE WHITE HEN

Where?

THE BLACK HEN

On the honey-suckle.

THE TURKEY

That kind is called an Admiral.

THE CHICK

[*Looking after the* BUTTERFLY.] Now he has settled on a pink.

THE WHITE HEN

[*To the* TURKEY.] An Admiral, wherefore?

THE BLACKBIRD

Obviously because he is neither a seaman nor a soldier.

THE WHITE HEN

Our Blackbird has a pretty wit!

THE TURKEY

[*Nodding and swinging his red stalactite.*] He has better than wit, my dear!

ANOTHER HEN

[*Watching the* BUTTERFLY.] It's sweet — a butterfly!

THE BLACKBIRD

Easy as possible to make! You take a W and set it on top of a Y!

A Hen

[*Delighted.*] A flourish of his bill, and there you have your caricature!

The Turkey

He does better than execute caricatures! Hen, our Blackbird forces you to think while obliging you to laugh. He is a Teacher in wit's clothing.

A Chick

[*To a* Hen.] Mother, why does the Cat hate the Dog?

The Blackbird

Because he appropriates his seat at the theatre.

The Chick

[*Surprised.*] They have a theatre?

The Blackbird

Where dumb-shows are given.

The Chick

Eh?

The Blackbird

The hearthstone from whence both alike wish to watch the play of the Fire among the Logs.

The Turkey

[*Delighted.*] How aptly he conveys that the hatred of peoples is at bottom a question of wanting the other's territory. There's a brain for you!

THE SPECKLED HEN

[*To the* WHITE HEN, *who is pecking.*] Do you peck peppers?

THE WHITE HEN

Constantly.

THE SPECKLED HEN

How can you stand the sting?

THE WHITE HEN

It imparts to the feathers a delicate rosy tint.

THE SPECKLED HEN

Oh, does it!

A VOICE IN THE DISTANCE

Cuckoo!

THE WHITE HEN

Listen!

THE VOICE

[*From a greater distance.*] Cuckoo!

THE WHITE HEN

The Cuckoo!

A GREY HEN

[*Comes running excitedly.*] Which Cuckoo? The one who lives in the woods, or the one who lives in the clock?

THE VOICE

[*Still further off.*] Cuckoo!

THE WHITE HEN

The one of the woods.

THE GREY HEN

[*With a sigh of relief.*] Oh, I was so afraid of having missed the other!

THE WHITE HEN

[*Going near enough to her to speak in an undertone.* Do you mean to say you love him?

THE GREY HEN

[*Sadly.*] Without ever having set eyes on him. He lives in a châlet hanging on the kitchen wall, above the farmer's great-coat and fowling-piece. The moment he sings, I rush to the spot, but I never get there in time to see anything but his little wicket closing. This evening I mean to stay right here beside the door — [*She takes up her position on the threshold*].

A VOICE

White Hen!

SCENE SECOND

THE SAME, *a* PIGEON *on the roof, later* CHANTECLER.

THE WHITE HEN

[*Looking about with quick jerks of her head.*] Who called me?

THE VOICE

A pigeon.

THE WHITE HEN

[*Looking for him.*] Where?

THE PIGEON

On the sloping roof.

THE WHITE HEN

[*Lifting her head and seeing him.*] Ah!

THE PIGEON

Though I am the bearer of an important missive, I would not miss the opportunity —— Good evening, Hen!

THE WHITE HEN

Postman, howdedo?

THE PIGEON

My duty on the Postal Service of the Air obliging me this summer evening to pass your habitations, I should be most happy if ——

THE WHITE HEN

[*Spying a crumb of some sort.*] One moment, please.

ANOTHER HEN

[*Running eagerly towards her.*] What are you eating?

ALL THE HENS

[*Arriving at a run.*] What's she eating?

THE WHITE HEN

A simple grain of wheat.

THE GREY HEN

[*Taking up her conversation with the* WHITE HEN.] As I was telling you, I mean to stay right on the door-step there — [*Showing the door of the house.*]

THE WHITE HEN

[*Looking at the door.*] The door is shut.

THE GREY HEN

Yes, but I shall hear the hour striking, and I will catch a look at my Cuckoo by stretching my neck —

THE PIGEON

[*Calling, slightly out of patience.*] White Hen!

THE WHITE HEN

One moment, please! [*To the* GREY HEN] — Catch a look at your Cuckoo, by stretching your neck where? — Where?

THE GREY HEN

[*Pointing with her beak at the small, round opening at the foot of the door.*] Through the cat-hole!

THE PIGEON

[*Raising his voice to a shout.*] Am I to be kept here cooling my feet on your rain-pipe? Hi, there, whitest of Hens!

THE WHITE HEN

[*Hopping towards him.*] You were saying?

THE PIGEON

I was about to say ——

THE WHITE HEN

What, bluest of Pigeons?

THE PIGEON

That I should consider myself past expression fortunate if —— But no! I am abashed at my own boldness! — if I might be so favoured as to be permitted to get a glimpse ——

THE WHITE HEN

Of what?

THE PIGEON

Oh, just a glimpse, the very least glimpse of ——

ALL THE HENS

[*Impatiently.*] Of what? — What?

THE PIGEON

Of his comb!

THE WHITE HEN

[*Laughing, to the others.*] Ha! ha! he wishes to see——

THE PIGEON

[*In great excitement.*] That's it! Just to see ——

THE WHITE HEN

There, there, cool down!

THE PIGEON

I am shaking with excitement!

THE WHITE HEN

You are shaking down the roof!

THE PIGEON

You can't think how we admire him!

THE WHITE HEN

Oh, everyone admires him!

THE PIGEON

And I promised my missis to tell her what he is like!

THE WHITE HEN

[*Quietly pecking.*] Oh, he's a fine fellow, no doubt of that!

THE PIGEON

We can hear him crowing from our dove-cote. The One he is whose song is more an ornament to the landscape than the white hamlet to the hill! The One he is whose cry pierces the blue horizon like a gold-threaded needle stitching the hill-tops to the sky! The Cock he is! When you would praise him, call him the Cock!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping up and down in his cage.*] Tick-tock! — who sets all hearts a-beating, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock!

A HEN

Our Cock!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Thrusting his head between the bars of his cage.*] My, thy, his, her, our, your, and their Cock!

THE TURKEY

[*To the* PIGEON.] He will soon be coming in from his usual round in the fields.

THE PIGEON

You have the honour of his acquaintance, sir?

THE TURKEY

[*Importantly.*] I have known him from a baby. This chick — for to me he is still a chick! — used to come to me for his bugle lesson.

THE PIGEON

Ah, indeed? You give lessons in ——

THE TURKEY

Certainly. A bird who can gobble is qualified to teach crowing.

THE PIGEON

Where was he born?

THE TURKEY

[*Indicating an old covered basket, badly battered and broken.*] In that old basket.

THE PIGEON

And is the hen who brooded him still living?

THE TURKEY

[*Again indicating the basket.*] She is there.

THE PIGEON

Where?

THE TURKEY

In that old basket.

THE PIGEON

[*More and more interested.*] Of what breed is she?

THE TURKEY

She is just a good old-fashioned Gascon hen, born in the neighbourhood of Pau.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Thrusting out his head.*] She is the one Henry the Fourth wished to see cooking in every Frenchman's pot!

THE PIGEON

How proud she must be of having hatched such a Cock!

THE TURKEY

Yes, proud with a lowly foster-mother's pride. Her beloved chick is coming to his inches, that is all she seems to understand or care about. And when you tell her this, her clouded reason gives a momentary gleam — [*Calling towards the basket.*] Hey, old lady, he is growing!

ALL THE HENS

He is growing!

[*The lid of the basket is suddenly lifted, and a bristling aged hen's head appears.*]

THE PIGEON

[*To the* OLD HEN, *gently and feelingly.*] Does it make you happy, mother, to think of him grown to a big fine Cock?

THE OLD HEN

[*Nodding, sententiously.*] Happy?—Wednesday's crops do credit to Tuesday! [*She disappears, the lid drops.*]

THE TURKEY

She opens now and then, like that, and ping! shoots at us some such pearl of homely lore —

THE PIGEON

[*To the* WHITE HEN.] White Hen!

THE TURKEY

—— not always wholly without point!

THE OLD HEN

[*Reappearing for an instant.*] In the Peacock's absence, the Turkey spreads his tail!

[*The* TURKEY *turns quickly around, the lid has already dropped.*]

THE PIGEON

[*To the* WHITE HEN.] Is it a fact that Chantecler is never hoarse, never the very least husky?

THE WHITE HEN

[*Keeping on with her pecking.*] Perfectly true.

THE PIGEON

[*With growing enthusiasm.*] Ah, you must be proud

indeed of having here among you, under these elms, a Cock who will be numbered among Illustrious Animals and his name remembered five, ten, fifteen years!

THE TURKEY

Very proud. Very proud. [*To a* CHICK.] Who are the Illustrious Animals? Tell them off!

THE CHICK

[*Reciting a lesson.*] Noah's Dove — Saint Rocco's Poodle — The — the Horse of Cali ——

THE TURKEY

Cali ——?

THE CHICK

[*Trying to remember.*] Cali ——

THE PIGEON

This Cock, now — this Cock of yours — Is it true that his song attunes, inspires, encourages, makes labour light, and keeps off birds of prey?

THE WHITE HEN

[*Pecking.*] Perfectly true.

THE CHICK

[*Still hunting for his word.*] Cali —— Cali ——

THE PIGEON

White Hen, is it true that by his song, defender of the warm and sacred egg, he has frequently kept the lissome weasel from ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Looking out between the bars.*]—— messing his shirt-front with omelette?

THE WHITE HEN

Perfectly true.

THE CHICK

Cali ——

THE TURKEY

[*Helping him.*] Gu?

THE CHICK

Gu ——

THE PIGEON

Is it true ——?

THE CHICK

[*Jumping for joy at having found.*] Gula!

THE PIGEON

—— true that, as report says, he has a secret for his amazing singing, a secret whereby his crow becomes the brilliant burst of red which makes the poppies of the field feel themselves contemptible imitations?

THE WHITE HEN

[*Weary of this questioning.*] Perfectly true.

THE PIGEON

That secret, that great secret, is it known to anyone?

THE WHITE HEN

No.

indeed of having here among you, under these elms, a Cock who will be numbered among Illustrious Animals and his name remembered five, ten, fifteen years!

THE TURKEY

Very proud. Very proud. [*To a* CHICK.] Who are the Illustrious Animals? Tell them off!

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THE CHICK

[*Still hunting for his word.*] Cali —— Cali ——

THE PIGEON

White Hen, is it true that by his song, defender of the warm and sacred egg, he has frequently kept the lissome weasel from ——

THE TURKEY

[*Solemnly.*] Fate!

THE BLACKBIRD

In a thin disguise of gauze!

THE WHITE HEN

Oh, a net — at the end of a cane!

THE BLACKBIRD

No harm in the cane — it's the kid at the other end of the cane! [*Half aloud, watching the* BUTTERFLY.] You neat little fop, sailing from rose to rose, to-night you'll be neat as a pin can make you!

ALL

[*Watching the cautious approach of the net beyond the wall.*] Nearer — Nearer — Hush! He'll catch it! — No, he won't! — Yes, he will!

SUDDENLY OUTSIDE

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

[*At the sound, the* BUTTERFLY *flies off. The* NET *wavers a moment, with an effect of disappointment, then disappears.*]

SEVERAL HENS

What? — Eh? — What was it?

A HEN

[*Who having hopped up on a wheelbarrow can follow*

the flight of the BUTTERFLY.] He is off and away, over the meadow.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*With ironical emphasis.*] It's Chantecler, practising knight-errantry!

THE PIGEON

[*With emotion.*] Chantecler!

A HEN

He is coming!

ANOTHER HEN

He is just outside ——

THE WHITE HEN

[*To the* PIGEON.] Now you will see. He's a very fine bird indeed.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Thrusting his head between the bars.*] Easy as possible to make, a Cock!

THE TURKEY

[*Admiringly.*] Admirable amenity!

THE BLACKBIRD

You take a melon — a fine specimen, I will grant, — for the trunk. For the legs, two sticks of asparagus, — prize sticks, of course. For the head, a red pepper, — as handsome as you may find. For the eye, a currant, — exceptionally clear and light. For the tail, a sheaf

of leeks, with luxuriant blue-green flags. For the ear, a dainty kidney-bean, — extra, superfine! — And there you have him, there's your Cock!

THE PIGEON

[*Gently.*] One thing you have omitted — His heavenly clarion call!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Indicating* CHANTECLER, *who now appears upon the wall.*] Yes, but with the exception of that — slight detail, you must own my portrait is a likeness.

THE PIGEON

Not at all. Not in the very least. [*Contemplating* CHANTECLER *with a very different eye from the* BLACKBIRD'S.] What I see, beneath that quivering hemlet, is Summer's glorious and favoured knight, who, from a groaning wain at evening borrowing its golden harvest-robe, has arrayed himself in this, and lifts it from the dust with a gleaming sickle!

CHANTECLER

[*On the wall, in a long guttural sigh.*] Coa ——

THE BLACKBIRD

When he makes that noise in his throat, he either is in love, or preparing some poetic outburst.

CHANTECLER

[*Motionless on the wall, with head high.*] Blaze forth in glory! — Dazzle ——

THE BLACKBIRD

He's letting off hot air!

CHANTECLER

Irradiate the world!

A HEN

Now he pauses — one claw lifted ——

CHANTECLER

[*In a sort of groan of excessive tenderness.*] Coa —

THE BLACKBIRD

That, if you please, is ecstasy!

CHANTECLER

Thy gold is of all gold alone beneficent! I worship thee!

THE PIGEON

[*Under breath.*] To whom is he talking?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Sneering.*] To the sun, sonny, the sun!

CHANTECLER

O thou that driest the tears of the meanest among weeds
And dost of a dead flower make a living butterfly —
Thy miracle, wherever almond-trees
Shower down the wind their scented shreds,
Dead petals dancing in a living swarm —

I worship thee, O Sun! whose ample light,
Blessing every forehead, ripening every fruit,
Entering every flower and every hovel,
Pours itself forth and yet is never less,
Still spending and unspent — like mother's love!

I sing of thee, and will be thy high priest,
Who disdainest not to glass thy shining face
In the humble basin of blue suds,
Or see the lightning of thy last farewell
Reflected in an humble cottage pane!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Thrusting out his head.*] Can't call it off now, boys, he's started on an ode!

THE TURKEY

[*Watching* CHANTECLER *as by a series of stately hops he comes down a pile of hay.*] Here he comes, prouder than ——

A HEN

[*Stopping in front of a small tin cone.*] See there! The new-fangled drinking-trough! [*She drinks.*] Handy!

THE BLACKBIRD

Prouder than a drum major chanting as he marches: "My country, 'tis of thee!"

CHANTECLER

[*Beginning to walk about the yard.*] Thou smilest on the ——

ALL THE HENS

[*Rushing to the* WHITE HEN *who is eating something.*]
What's she eating?

THE WHITE HEN

Corn. Nothing but corn.

CHANTECLER

Thou smilest on the sunflower craning after thee,
And burnishest my brother of the vane,
And softly sifting through the linden-trees
Strewest the ground with dappled gold,
So fine there's no more walking where it lies.

Through thee the earthen pot is an enamelled urn,
The clout hung out to dry a noble banner,
The hay-rick by thy favour boasts a golden cape,
And the rick's little sister, the thatched hive,
Wears, by thy grace, a hood of gold!

Glory to thee in the vineyards! Glory to thee in the fields!
Glory among the grass and on the roofs,
In eyes of lizards and on wings of swans, —
Artist who making splendid the great things
Forgets not to make exquisite the small!

'Tis thou that, cutting out a silhouette,
To all thou beamest on dost fasten this dark twin,
Doubling the number of delightful shapes,
Appointing to each thing its shadow,
More charming often than itself.

I praise thee, Sun! Thou sheddest roses on the air,
Diamonds on the stream, enchantment on the hill;
A poor dull tree thou takest and turnest to green rapture,
O Sun, without whose golden magic — things
Would be no more than what they are!

THE PIGEON

Bravo! I shall have something to tell my mate. We shall long talk of this!

CHANTECLER

[*Seeing him, with noble courtesy.*] Young blue-winged stranger, with new-fledged bill, thanks! Pray lay my duty at her coral feet!

[*The* PIGEON *flies off.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

Jolly your admirers, it pays!

CHANTECLER

[*In a cordial voice, to the whole barnyard.*] To work now, all of you, with a will!

[*A* FLY *darts past, buzzing.*]

CHANTECLER

Busy and resonant Fly, I love thee! Behold her! What is her flight but the heart-whole gift of herself?

THE TURKEY

[*Loftily.*] Yes. — She has dropped considerably in my esteem, however, since that matter of the ——

CHANTECLER

Of the what?

THE TURKEY

Of the Fly and the ——

CHANTECLER

I never thought much of that story. Who knows whether the coach would have reached the top of the hill without the Fly? Do you believe that rude shouts "Gee up! Ge' lang!" were more effective than the hymn to the Sun buzzed by the little Fly? Do you believe in the virtue of a blustering oath? Really believe it was the Coachman who made the coach to go? No, I tell you, no! She did much more than the big whip's noisy cracking, did the little Fly, with the music straight from her buzzing heart!

THE TURKEY

Yes, but all the same ——

CHANTECLER

[*Turning his back on him.*] Come, let us make of labour a delight! Come, all of you! — High time, Ganders, my worthies, you escorted your geese to the pond.

A GANDER

[*Lazily.*] Is it quite necessary, do you think?

CHANTECLER

[*Going briskly towards him, with a look that forbids discussion.*] Quite! And let there be no idle quacking and paltering! [*The* GANDERS *go off in haste.*] You, Chicken, your task, as you know, is to pick off slugs, your full number before evening being thirty-two. —

You, Cockerel, go practise your crow. Four hundred times cry Cock-a-doodle-doo in hearing of the echo!

THE COCKEREL

[*Slightly mortified.*] The echo —— ?

CHANTECLER

That is what I was doing to limber up my glottis before I was rid of the egg-shell sticking to my tail!

A HEN

[*Airily.*] None of this is particularly interesting!

CHANTECLER

Everything is interesting! Pray go and sit on the eggs you have been entrusted with! [*To another* HEN.] You, walk among the roses and verbenas, and gobble every creature threatening them. Ha, ha! If the caterpillar thinks we will make him a gift of our flowers he can stroke his belly — with his back! [*To another.*] You, hie to the rescue of cabbages in old neglected corners, where the grasshopper lays siege to them with his vigorous battering-ram! [*To the remaining* HENS.] You — [*Catching sight of the* OLD HEN, *whose shaking, senile head has lifted the basket-lid.*] Ah, there you are, Nursie! Good day! [*She gazes at him admiringly.*] Well, have I grown?

THE OLD HEN

Sooner or later, tadpole becomes toad!

CHANTECLER

True! [*To the* HENS, *resuming his tone of command.*]

Ladies, stand in line! Your orders are to peck in the fields. Off at a quick-step, go!

THE WHITE HEN

[*To the* GREY HEN.] Are you coming?

THE GREY HEN

Not a word! I intend to stay behind, to see the Cuckoo. [*She hides behind the basket.*]

CHANTECLER

You, little tufted hen, was it just my fancy that you looked sulky falling into line?

THE TUFTED HEN

[*Going up to him.*] Cock ——

CHANTECLER

What is it?

THE TUFTED HEN

I, who am nearest to your heart ——

CHANTECLER

[*Quickly.*] Hush!

THE TUFTED HEN

It annoys me not to be told ——

THE WHITE HEN

[*Who has drawn near on the other side.*] Cock ——

CHANTECLER

Well?

THE WHITE HEN

[*Coaxingly.*] I who am your favourite ——

CHANTECLER

[*Quickly.*] Hush!

THE WHITE HEN

[*Caressingly.*] I want to know ——

THE BLACK HEN

[*Who has softly drawn near.*] Cock ——

CHANTECLER

What?

THE BLACK HEN

Your special and tender regard for me —

CHANTECLER

[*Quickly.*] Hush!

THE BLACK HEN

Tell me, do ——

THE WHITE HEN

—— the secret ——

THE TUFTED HEN

—— of your song? [*Going still closer to him, in a voice thrilled with curiosity.*] I do believe that you have in your throat a little copper contrivance ——

CHANTECLER

That's it, that's what I have, very carefully concealed!

THE WHITE HEN

[*Same business.*] Most likely, like great tenors one has heard of, you gulp raw eggs ——

CHANTECLER

You have guessed! — A second Ugolino!

THE BLACK HEN

[*Same business.*] My idea is that taking snails out of their shells, you pound them to a paste ——

CHANTECLER

And make them into troches! Exactly!

ALL THREE HENS

Cock ——!

CHANTECLER

Off with you all! Be off! [*The* HENS *hastily start, he calls them back.*] A word before you go. When your blood-bright combs — now in, now out of sight, now in again — shall flash among the sage and borage yonder, like poppies playing at hide-and-seek, — to the real poppies, I enjoin you, do no injury! Shepherdesses, counting the stitches of their knitting, trample the grass all unaware that it's a crime to crush a flower — even with a woman! But you, my Spouses, show considerate and touching thought for the flowers whose only offence is growing wild. The field-carrot has her right to bloom in beauty. Should you spy, as he strolls across some flowery umbel, a scarlet beetle peppered with black dots, — the stroller take, but spare his

strolling-ground. The flowers of one same meadow are sisters, as I hold, and should together fall beneath the scythe! — Now you may go. [*They are leaving, he again calls them back.*] And remember, when chickens go to the ——

A Hen

—— fields ——

Chantecler

—— the foremost ——

The Hens All Together

—— walks ahead!

Chantecler

You may go! [*They are again starting, he peremptorily calls them back.*] A word! [*In a stern voice.*] Never when crossing the road stop to peck! [*The* Hens *bow in obedience.*] Now let me see you cross!

A Horn

[*In the distance.*] Honk! Honk! Honk!

Chantecler

[*Rushing in front of the* Hens *and spreading his wings before them.*] Not yet!

The Horn

[*Very near, accompanied by a terrific snorting.*] Honk! Honk! Honk!

Chantecler

[*Barring the* Hens' *passage, while everything shakes.*] Wait!

THE HORN

[*Far away.*] Honk! Honk! Honk!

CHANTECLER

[*Standing aside for them to pass.*] You can safely go!

THE GREY HEN

[*From her hiding-place.*] He has not seen me!

THE TUFTED HEN

You may think this is fun! Now everything we eat will taste of gasoline!

SCENE THIRD

CHANTECLER, *the* BLACKBIRD *in his cage, the* CAT *still asleep on the wall, the* GREY HEN *behind the* OLD HEN'S *basket.*

CHANTECLER

[*To himself, after a pause.*] No, I will not trust a frivolous soul with such a weighty secret. Let me try rather to cast off the burden of it myself — forget and [*Shaking his feathers.*] just rejoice in being a rooster! [*He struts up and down.*] I am beautiful. I am proud. I walk — then I stand still. I give a skip or two, I tread a measure. — I shock the cart sometimes by my boldness with the fair, so that it raises scandalised shafts in horror to the sky! — Hang care! — A barley-corn. — Eat and be merry. — The gear upon my head and under my eye is a far more gorgeous red, when I

puff out my chest and strut, than any robin's waistcoat or finch's tie. — A fine day. All is well. I curvet — I blow my horn. Conscious of having done my duty, I may quite properly assume the swagger of a musketeer, and the calm commanding bearing of a cardinal. I can ——

A VOICE

[*Loud and gruff.*] Beware, Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

What silly beast is bidding me beware?

SCENE FOURTH

THE SAME, PATOU.

PATOU

[*Barking inside his kennel.*] I! I! I!

CHANTECLER

[*Retreating.*] Is it you, Patou, good shaggy head starting out of the dark, with straws caught among your eyelashes?

PATOU

Which do not prevent my seeing what is plain as that hen-house rrrroof!

CHANTECLER

Cross?

PATOU

Grrrrrrr ——

CHANTECLER

When he rolls his r's like that he is very cross indeed.

PATOU

It's my devotion to you, Cock, makes me roll my R's. Guardian of the house, the orchard and the fields, more than all else I am bound to protect your song. And I growl at the dangers I suspect lurking. Such is my humour.

CHANTECLER

Your humour? Your dogma, suspicion is! Call it your *dog*ma!

PATOU

You can stoop to a pun? From bad to worse! I'm enough of a psychologist to feel the evil spreading, and I've the scent of a rat-terrier.

CHANTECLER

But you are no rat-terrier!

PATOU

[*Shaking his head.*] Chantecler, how do we know?

CHANTECLER

[*Considering him.*] Your appearance is in fact peculiar. What actually is your breed?

PATOU

I am a horrible mixture, issue of every passer-by!

I can feel barking within me the voice of every blood. Retriever, mastiff, pointer, poodle, hound — my soul is a whole pack, sitting in circle, musing. Cock, I am all dogs, I have been every dog!

CHANTECLER

Then what a sum of goodness must be stored in you!

PATOU

Brother, we are framed to understand each other. You sing to the sun and scratch up the earth. I, when I wish to do myself a good and a pleasure ——

CHANTECLER

You lie on the earth and sleep in the sun!

PATOU

[*With a pleased yap.*] Aye!

CHANTECLER

We have ever had in common our love for those two things.

PATOU

I am so fond of the sun that I howl at the moon. And so fond of the earth that I dig great holes and shove my nose in it!

CHANTECLER

I know! The gardener's wife has her opinion of those holes. — But what are the dangers you discern? All lies quiet beneath the quiet sky. Nothing appears to be threatening my humble sunlit dominions.

THE OLD HEN

[*Lifting the basket-lid with her head.*] The egg looks like marble until it gets smashed! [*The lid drops.*]

CHANTECLER

[*To* PATOU.] What dangers, friend?

PATOU

There are two. First, in yonder cage ——

CHANTECLER

Well?

PATOU

That satirical whistling.

CHANTECLER

What about it?

PATOU

Pernicious.

CHANTECLER

In what way?

PATOU

In every way!

CHANTECLER

[*Ironical.*] Bad as all that, is it?

[*The* PEACOCK'S *squall is heard in the distance: "Ee—yong!"*]

PATOU

And then that cry, the Peacock's!

[*The* PEACOCK, *further off: "Ee—yong!"*]

PATOU

More out of tune all by itself than a whole village singing society!

CHANTECLER

Come, what have they done to you, that whistler and that posturer?

PATOU

[*Grumbling.*] They have done to me — that I know not what they may do to you! They have done to me — that among us simple, kindly folk they have introduced new fashions, the Blackbird of being funny, the Peacock of putting on airs! Fashions which the latter in his grotesque bad taste picked up parading on the marble terraces of the vulgar rich, and the former — Heaven knows where! along with his cynicism and his slang. Now the one, travelling salesman of blighting, corrosive laughter, and the other, brainless ambassador of Fashion, their mission to kill among us love and labour, the first by persiflage, the second by display, — they have brought to us, even here in our peaceful sunny corner, the two pests, the saddest in the world, the jest which insists on being funny at any cost, and the cry which insists on being the latest scream! [*The* BLACKBIRD *is heard tentatively whistling, "How sweet to fare afield".*] You, Cock, who had the sense to prefer the grain of true wheat to the pearl, how can you allow yourself to be taken in by that villainous Blackbird! A bird who practises a tune!

CHANTECLER

[*Indulgently.*] Come, he whistles his tune like many another!

PATOU

[*Unwillingly agreeing, in a drawling growl.*] Ye-e-es, but he never whistles it to the end!

CHANTECLER

[*Watching the* BLACKBIRD *hopping about.*] A light-hearted fellow!

PATOU

[*Same business.*] Ye-e-es, but he lies heavy on our hearts. A bird who takes his exercise indoors!

CHANTECLER

You must own he is intelligent!

PATOU

[*In a longer, more hesitant growl.*] Ye-e-e-es! But not so very! For his eye never brightens with wonder and admiration. He preserves before the flower — of whose stalk he sees more than of its chalice — the glance which deflowers, the tone which depreciates!

CHANTECLER

Taste, my dear fellow, he unmistakably has!

PATOU

Ye-e-e-es! But not much taste! To wear black is too easy a way of having taste! One should have the courage of colours on his wing.

CHANTECLER

You will admit at least that he has an original fancy. No denying that he is amusing.

PATOU

Ye-e-es — No! Why is it amusing to adopt a few stock phrases and make them do service at every turn? Why amusing to miscall, exaggerate, and vulgarise?

CHANTECLER

His mind has a diverting, unexpected turn ——

PATOU

Ready but cheap! I cannot think it particularly brilliant to remark, with a knowing wink, at sight of an innocent cow at pasture, "The simple cow knows her way to the hay!" Nor do I regard it as evidence of notable mental gifts to answer the greeting of the inoffensive duck, "The quack shoots off his mouth!" No, the extravagances of that Blackbird, who makes me bristle, no more constitute wit than his slang achieves style!

CHANTECLER

He is not altogether to blame. He wears the modern garb. See him there in correct evening dress. He looks, in his neat black coat ——

PATOU

Like a beastly little undertaker who, after burying Faith, hops with relief and glee!

CHANTECLER

There, there! You make him blacker than he is!

PATOU

I do believe a blackbird is just a misfit crow!

CHANTECLER

His diminutive size, however ——

PATOU

[*Vigorously shaking his ears.*] Oh, be not deceived by his size! Evil makes his models first on a tiny scale. The soul of a cutlass dwells in the pocket-knife; blackbird and crow are of the selfsame crape, and the striped wasp is a tiger in miniature!

CHANTECLER

[*Amused at* PATOU'S *violence.*] The blackbird in short is wicked, stupid, ugly ——

PATOU

The chief thing about the Blackbird is — that you can't tell what he is! Is there thought in that head? feeling in that breast? Hear him! "Tew-tew-tew-tew tew ——"

CHANTECLER

But what harm does he do?

PATOU

He tew-tew-tews! And nothing is so mortal to thought and sentiment as that same derisive tew-tewing, disingenuous and non-committal! Day by day, and that is why I roll my rs, I must witness this debasing of language and ideals. It's enough to produce rabies!

CHANTECLER

Come, Patou! ——

PATOU

In their objectionable jargon, they have the ha-ha on all of us! I am no fastidious King Charles, but I dislike, I tell you, being referred to as His Whiskers! — Oh, to be gone, escape, follow the heels of some poor shepherd without a crust in his wallet, but at least, at evening drinking from the glassy pond, to have — oh, better than all marrow-bones! — the fresh illusion of lapping up the stars!

CHANTECLER

[*Surprised at* PATOU'S *having lowered his voice to utter the last words.*] Why do you drop your voice?

PATOU

You see? — If we speak of stars nowadays we must do it in a whisper! [*He lays his head on his paws in deep dejection.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Comforting him.*] Be not downcast!

PATOU

[*Lifting his head again.*] No, it is too silly and too weak! I'll shout it if I please! [*He howls with the whole power of his lungs.*] Stars! — [*Then in a tone of relief.*] There, I feel better!

CHICKENS

[*Passing at the back, mocking.*] Stars! — Ho! Stars for ours! Stars! [*They go off, fooling and giggling.*]

PATOU

Hear them! Our pullets will be whistling soon like blackbirds!

CHANTECLER

[*Proudly strutting up and down.*] What care I? I sing, and have on my side the Hens.

PATOU

Trust not to the hearts of Hens — or of crowds. You are too willing to take the price of your singing in lip-service.

CHANTECLER

But love — love is glory awarded in kisses!

PATOU

Ah! I, too, was young once, I had my wilding devil's beauty, — an inflammatory eye, an inflammable heart. Well, I was deceived. For a handsomer dog? — No, they deceived me for a miserable cur! — [*Roaring in sudden wrath.*] For whom? — For whom, do you suppose?

CHANTECLER

[*Retreating.*] You alarm me!

PATOU

For a low-down dachshund who trod on his own ears!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Who has overheard* PATOU'S *last words, sticking his head between the bars of his cage.*] Still harping on the dachshund, is he? What's the odds, old chappie? You were the goat! — How does being the goat matter?

PATOU

But you up there, scoffing at everything, who are you, may one ask?

BLACKBIRD

I'm the pet of the poultry yard!

PATOU

Bad luck is what you'll bring them!

BLACKBIRD

A prophecy-sharp? — Say, wistaria, we are twisted up with laughter! [*He comes out of his cage and hops to the ground.*]

PATOU

[*As he approaches.*] Grrrrrr ——

CHANTECLER

Hush! He's a friend!

PATOU

A false one.

CHANTECLER

[*To* BLACKBIRD.] Fine things we learn when the talk is of you!

THE OLD HEN

[*Her head protruding from the basket.*] Strike rotten wood, and see the wood-lice scatter! [*The basket-lid drops.*]

PATOU

[*To* CHANTECLER.] He laughs at you behind your back!

BLACKBIRD

[*To* PATOU.] Ha, retriever, you retrieve?

PATOU

When you pour forth your heart in your ardent cry, giving it over and over, he calls it the same old saw that your jag-toothed red crest stands for!

CHANTECLER

So that's what you say?

BLACKBIRD

[*Affecting simplicity.*] You surely don't mind? How can it affect you? And a joke about you is always so sure of success!

PATOU

[*To the* BLACKBIRD.] Point-blank, do you admire or despise the Cock?

BLACKBIRD

I make fun of him in spots, but admire him in lump!

PATOU

You always peck two kinds of seed.

THE BLACKBIRD

My cage has two seed-cups, you see.

PATOU

I am single-minded and downright!

THE BLACKBIRD

You — are an old poodle of the year 48! I am an up-to-date bird!

PATOU

[*Gruffly.*] Out of my way! lest I give your black coat red tails! [*The* BLACKBIRD *nimbly gets out of the way,* PATOU *goes into his kennel grumbling.*] I'll show him some up-to-date jaws!

CHANTECLER

Be quiet! It's his way. The truth is that if once he stood in the presence of beauty, this very Blackbird would applaud!

PATOU

Not with both wings! What can you expect of a bird who, with woodbine and juniper full in sight, prefers to go inside and peck at a musty biscuit?

BLACKBIRD

He never seems to suspect that the poacher is a blackguardly sort of brute!

PATOU

What I know is that the underbrush is all a delicate golden gloom ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Yes, but leaden shot can cleave your delicate gold. The quail is such a canny bird, that he lies low lest he make his last appearance on toast. And so, in lack of quail ——

PATOU

Does the great stag delight any the less in his green forest for turning over among the grass at evening some bit of a rusty cartridge?

THE BLACKBIRD

No, old chap — but the stag, you see, is just another kind of a hat-rack!

PATOU

Oh, but freedom, freedom, with violets looking on! Love! ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Antediluvian pastimes! not nearly such good fun as my nice new wooden trapeze. Oh, my cage, let us sign a joyful three-six-nine years' lease! I live like a Duke, I have filtered drinking-water —— [*At* PATOU'S *significant start and growl, he springs aside, finishing.*] You can sling mud upon me, I have a porcelain bath!

CHANTECLER

[*Slightly out of patience.*] Why not make a practice of talking simply and to the point?

THE BLACKBIRD

I like to make you sit up, and watch you blinking.

PATOU

Grrrrr — in the plain interest of public decency, I say it behooves us ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Don't say behooves, say it's up to you, old chap!

CHANTECLER

What's all this juggling with words?

THE BLACKBIRD

The thing, Chantecler, quite the thing! I knew a city sparrow once, and it's the way they talk in fashionable circles.

CHANTECLER

I was well acquainted with a little red-breast, who lived beneath a city poet's eaves; he did not talk like you.

THE BLACKBIRD

I belong to my time. Every chap that's a bit of a swell nowadays must be a bit of a tough. It's smart, you know.

PATOU

I froth at the mouth! Smart, — there's the Peacock's password!

CHANTECLER

Oh, the Peacock, by the way, what is he doing these days?

THE BLACKBIRD

Ogling with his tail-feathers!

PATOU

Baneful his example has been to many an humble heart.

CHANTECLER

What signs do you see of his influence?

PATOU

A thousand nothings.

THE OLD HEN

[*Appearing.*] Bubbles floating down the stream tell of laundresses up stream! [*The lid drops.*]

CHANTECLER

I am sure I have not seen the smallest bubble from which ——

PATOU

[*Indicating a* GUINEA-PIG, *who is passing.*] See there, that Guinea-pig ——

CHANTECLER

[*Considering him.*] What about him? He is just a yellow Guinea-pig!

GUINEA-PIG

[*Snippily correcting.*] Khaki, if you please!

CHANTECLER

[*To* PATOU.] Kha —— ?

PATOU

A bubble! — And yonder waddling duck ——

CHANTECLER

[*Looking at him.*] He is going to take his bath ——

THE DUCK

[*Drily.*] My tub!

CHANTECLER

His —?

PATOU

A bubble!

[*A long grating noise is heard within the house Crrrrrrr, then.*]

THE CLOCK

Cuckoo!

THE GREY HEN

[*Leaving her hiding-place and running towards the cat-hole.*] His voice! — Now through the kitty's little door I finally shall see him! [*She thrusts her head into the hole. The* CUCKOO'S *call is not repeated.*] Oh, deary, deary me! I am too late! [*Calling.*] Bis! Encore!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning around at the noise.*] Eh?

THE GREY HEN

[*Desperately, with her head in the cat-hole.*] He has stopped!

THE BLACKBIRD

It was the half-hour.

CHANTECLER

[*Close behind the* GREY HEN, *abruptly.*] How does it happen, my love, that we are not in the fields?

THE GREY HEN

[*Turning, scared.*] Goodness gracious!

CHANTECLER

What are we doing, my love, in the cat-hole?

THE GREY HEN

[*Upset.*] I was just taking a peep ——

CHANTECLER

To see whom?

THE GREY HEN

[*More and more upset.*] Oh—— !

CHANTECLER

[*Dramatically.*] Who is it?

THE GREY HEN

Oh——

CHANTECLER

Confess!

THE GREY HEN

[*In the voice of a woman caught in guilt.*] The Cuckoo!

CHANTECLER

[*Amazed.*] You love him? — But wherefore?

THE GREY HEN

[*Drops her eyes, then with emotion.*] He is Swiss!

PATOU

A bubble!

THE GREY HEN

He is a thinker. He takes his airing ——

CHANTECLER

She loves a clock!

THE GREY HEN

— always takes his airing at the same hour, like Kant.

CHANTECLER

Like what?

THE GREY HEN

Like Kant.

CHANTECLER

Did one ever —— ! Out of my sight!

THE BLACKBIRD

Trot, Kant you?

[THE GREY HEN *hurries off.*]

CHANTECLER

Here's a pretty —— Wherever did she learn that Kant —?

PATOU

At the Guinea-hen's.

CHANTECLER

That foolish old party of the crazy cries and the white-plastered beak?

PATOU

She has taken a day.

CHANTECLER

A day off, do you mean?

PATOU

No, a day at home.

CHANTECLER

A day at —— Where does she receive?

THE BLACKBIRD

In a corner of the kitchen-garden.

PATOU

Under the auspices of that strawman with the unsavoury old top-hat.

CHANTECLER

The scarecrow?

THE BLACKBIRD

Yes, his being there makes the affair select.

CHANTECLER

[*Bewildered.*] How is that?

THE BLACKBIRD

Don't you see? He scares off all the puny fowl —. Poor relations are not wanted at a function.

CHANTECLER

So the Guinea-hen has a day!

PATOU

[*Phlegmatically.*] A bubble!

CHANTECLER

A balloon!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Imitating the* GUINEA-HEN.] Mondays, my dear ——

CHANTECLER

And what do they do at that feather-brain's parties?

PATOU

Cluck and cackle. The Turkey-cock airs his social gifts, the Chick gets into society.

BLACKBIRD

[*Imitating the* GUINEA-HEN.] From five to six ——

CHANTECLER

Evening?

PATOU

No, morning.

CHANTECLER

What —— ?

THE BLACKBIRD

You see, she must take advantage of the time when the garden is deserted, and yet have it a five-o'clock tea. So she chose the hour when the old gardener is at his early potations.

CHANTECLER

What nonsense!

THE BLACKBIRD

Quite so.

PATOU

You needn't talk. You go to her teas.

CHANTECLER

He goes —— ?

THE BLACKBIRD

Yes, I am one of their ornaments.

PATOU

And I am not so sure but that some day ——

CHANTECLER

What are you mumbling to your brass-studded collar?

PATOU

— some Hen may get you too to go!

CHANTECLER

Me?

PATOU

You!

CHANTECLER

Me? ——

PATOU

Led by the end of your beak.

CHANTECLER

[*In high wrath.*] Me? ——

PATOU

For when a new Hen heaves in sight, you can't help yourself, you know — you lose your balance-wheel ——

THE BLACKBIRD

You slowly circumambulate the fair one —— [*He imitates the* COCK *walking around a* HEN.] "Yes, it's me. — Here I am!" And you say, "Coa ——"

CHANTECLER

I never knew a more idiotic bird!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Continuing to mimic him.*] You let your wing hang, sentimentally — your foot performs a sort of stately jig — [*A shot is heard.*] Ha! I don't like that!

PATOU

[*Starts up quivering, and scents the air.*] Poaching Julius is at his tricks again!

THE BLACKBIRD

Dog, it seems to stimulate you agreeably!

PATOU

[*With ears up-pricked and shining eyes.*] Yes! [*Suddenly, as if controlling himself, passionately.*] No ——!

THE BLACKBIRD

What affects you so?

PATOU

Oh, horrible, horrible! A poor little partridge perhaps ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Is that streaming eye, my friend, a result of age or rheumatism?

PATOU

Neither! But I have within me several dogs, and there is conflict amidst me. My hunter's nostril twitches

at a shot, but, directly, my house-dog's memory raises before me a bleeding wing, the glazing eye of a doe, the pathos of a rabbit's dying look — and I feel the heart of a Saint Bernard waking in my breast! [*Another shot.*]

CHANTECLER

Again?

SCENE FIFTH

THE SAME, A GOLDEN PHEASANT, *later* BRIFFAUT.

A GOLDEN PHEASANT

[*Flying suddenly over the wall, and dropping in the yard, mad with fright.*] Hide me!

CHANTECLER

Heavens!

PATOU

A golden pheasant!

GOLDEN PHEASANT

Is this great Chantecler?

THE BLACKBIRD

All over the shop, we're famous!

GOLDEN PHEASANT

[*Running hither and thither.*] Save me, if you are he!

CHANTECLER

I am! — Rely on me!

[*Another shot.*]

GOLDEN PHEASANT

[*Jumping and casting himself on* CHANTECLER.] Merciful powers!

CHANTECLER

But what a nervous bird it is — a golden pheasant!

GOLDEN PHEASANT

I have no breath left! I ran too hard! — [*Faints.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

Puff! — Out goes his light!

CHANTECLER

[*Upholding the* PHEASANT *with one wing.*] How beautiful he is, with drooping neck and softly ruffled throat-feathers! [*He runs to the drinking-trough.*] Water! — One almost hesitates to dim such beauty with a wetting! — [*He splashes him vigorously with his other wing.*]

THE GOLDEN PHEASANT

[*Coming to.*] I am pursued! Oh, hide me!

THE BLACKBIRD

"And the villain still ——" Here's melodrama! [*To the* PHEASANT.] How the dickens did he manage to miss you?

THE PHEASANT

Surprise! — The huntsman was looking for a little grey lark. Seeing me rise, he cried, "Thunder!" He saw but a flash of gold, and I a flash of fire. — But the

dog is chasing me, a horrible dog —— [*Seeing* PATOU *he quickly adds.*] I am speaking of a hunting-dog! [*To* CHANTECLER.] Hide me!

CHANTECLER

The trouble is he is so conspicuous. That increases our dilemma. Where can he lie concealed? — Gentle sir, my lord, most noble stranger, where might we hope to hide the rainbow, supposing it in danger?

PATOU

There by the bench with the beehives stands my green cottage, very much at your service. — Go in, I pray! [*The* GOLDEN PHEASANT *goes in, but his long tail projects.*] There is too much of this golden vanity! — The tip is still in sight. — I shall have to sit on it.

[BRIFFAUT *appears above the wall. Long hanging ears and quivering chops.*]

PATOU

[*To* BRIFFAUT, *affecting unconcern.*] Good afternoon!

BRIFFAUT

[*Snuffing.*] Humph, what a good smell!

PATOU

[*Pointing to his bowl.*] My poor dinner! Soup with seasonable vegetables.

BRIFFAUT

[*Hurriedly.*] Have you seen a pheasant-hen go by?

PATOU

[*In astonishment, reflecting.*] A pheasant-hen —— ?

CHANTECLER

[*Walking about, with an assumption of gaiety.*] Impressive, isn't he, Briffaut there? with his look of a thoroughbred old Englishman!

PATOU

No, but I saw a pheasant.

BRIFFAUT

That was she!

PATOU

A pheasant-hen wears dun. This was a golden pheasant. He went off towards the meadow.

BRIFFAUT

It is she!

CHANTECLER

[*Going towards him, incredulous.*] A pheasant-hen with golden plumage?

BRIFFAUT

Ah, you do not know what sometimes happens?

CHANTECLER *and* PATOU

No.

THE BLACKBIRD

We are in for a hunting yarn! — Give me chloroform!

BRIFFAUT

It sometimes happens — the thing is exceptional, of course — My master knows because he has read about

it. — It sometimes happens — An extraordinary phenomenon, to be sure! which is likewise observed among moor-fowl. — It happens ——

PATOU

What happens?

BRIFFAUT

That the pheasant-hen —— Ah, my dear fellows ——!

CHANTECLER

[*Stamping with impatience.*] The pheasant-hen what? — what?

BRIFFAUT

Makes up her mind one day that the cock-pheasant goes altogether too fine. When the male in springtime puts on his holiday feathers, she sees that he is handsomer than she ——

THE BLACKBIRD

And it makes her sore!

BRIFFAUT

She leaves off laying and hatching eggs. Nature then gives her back her purple and her gold, and the pheasant-hen, proud and magnificent Amazon, preferring to put on her back blue, green, yellow, all the colours of the prism, rather than under a sober grey wing to shelter a brood of young pheasants, flies freely forth — Light-mindedly she sheds the virtues of her sex, and having done it — sees life! [*He sketches with his paw a slightly disrespectful gesture.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Drily.*] Pray, what do you know about it?

BRIFFAUT

[*Astonished.*] Is he annoyed?

PATOU

[*Aside.*] Already!

CHANTECLER

In short, the pheasant your master missed ——

BRIFFAUT

Was a she! —— [*He stops and scents the air.*] Oh but! ——

PATOU

[*Quickly, showing his dish.*] You know, it's my dinner you smell!

BRIFFAUT

It smells very unusually good.

CHANTECLER

[*Aside.*] I don't like that way his nose has of twitching.

BRIFFAUT

[*Starting upon another story.*] Fancy such an instance as the following ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Holy Smoke! Here comes another! — Oh, I say, hire a hall!

[*A distant whistle is heard.*

CHANTECLER

[*Quickly.*] You are whistled for!

BRIFFAUT

The deuce! Good evening! [*Disappears.*]

PATOU

Good evening.

CHANTECLER

Gone, at last!

BLACKBIRD

[*Calling.*] Briffaut!

CHANTECLER

Great Glory, what are you doing?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Calling.*] I have something to tell you!

BRIFFAUT

[*His head reappears above the wall.*] Well ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

Look out, Briffaut!

CHANTECLER

[*Low to the* BLACKBIRD.] Do you make sport of our fears?

THE BLACKBIRD

You are losing something!

BRIFFAUT

What?

THE BLACKBIRD

Time!

BRIFFAUT

[*Disappearing with a snort of fury.*] Wow!

SCENE SIXTH

CHANTECLER, THE BLACKBIRD, PATOU, THE PHEASANT-HEN.

CHANTECLER

[*After a moment, to the* BLACKBIRD *who from his cage, to which he has returned, can see off over the wall.*] Is he gone?

THE BLACKBIRD

He is nearly out of sight!

CHANTECLER

[*Going toward* PATOU'S *kennel.*] Madam, come forth!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Appearing at the threshold of the kennel.*] Well? — A rebellious, self-freed slave I am — even as that dog was saying! But of great lineage, and proud as I am free — A pheasant of the woods!

THE BLACKBIRD

Whew! We hate ourself, don't we!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

In the forest where I live there comes a-poaching ——

CHANTECLER

That madman who would have given to vile lead a jewel for setting!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Beneath foliage — not so thick but a sunbeam may glide in! — I make my home. I am descended, however, from elsewhere. From whence? From Persia? China? None can tell! But of one thing we may be certain: that I was meant to shimmer in the blue among the fragrant gum-trees of the East, and not to be chased through brambles by a hound! — Am I the ancient Phœnix? or the sacred Chinese hen? Whence was I brought to this land? And how brought? And by whom? History is not explicit on the point, and leaves us a splendid choice. Wherefore I choose to have been born in Colchis, from whence I came on Jason's fist. I am all gold. Perhaps I was the Fleece!

PATOU

You?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The Pheasant!

PATOU

[*Politely correcting her.*] Pheasant-hen.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I refer to my race, for which I stand, by token of my

crimson shield. Yes, my ancient fate of being a dead leaf beside a ruby, having appeared to me one day too distinctly dull a lot, I stole his dazzling plumage from the male. A good thing, too, for it becomes me so much better! The golden tippet, as I wear it, curves and shimmers. The emerald epaulette acquires a dainty grace. I have made of a mere uniform a miracle of style!

CHANTECLER

She is distractingly lovely, so much is certain!

PATOU

He is never going to fall in love with a woman dressed as a man!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Who has again hopped down from his cage.*] I must go and tell the Guinea-hen that a golden bird has blown into town. She'll have a fit! She will invite her! [*Off.*]

CHANTECLER

So you come to us from the East, like the Dawn?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

My life has the picturesque disorder of a poem. If I came from the East, it was by way of Egypt.

PATOU

[*Aside, heart-broken.*] A gypsy, on top of the rest!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER, *tossing and twisting her head so that the colours ripple at her throat.*] Have you noticed these

two shades? They are our own especial colours — the Dawn's and mine! Princess of the underbrush, queen of the glade, I am pleased to wear the yellow locks of an adventuress. Dreamy and homesick for my unknown home, I choose my palaces among the rustling flags and withered irises that fringe the pool. I dote upon the forest, and when it smells in autumn of dead leaves and decaying wood ——

PATOU

[*In consternation.*] She is mad!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Wild as a tree-bough in a southerly gale, I tremble, flutter, spend myself in motion, till a vast languor overtakes me ——

CHANTECLER

[*Who for a minute or so has been letting his wing hang, now begins slowly circling about the* PHEASANT-HEN, *in the manner of the* BLACKBIRD *aping him, with a very gentle, throaty*] Coa —— [*The* PHEASANT-HEN *looks at him. Believing himself encouraged, he takes up again louder, while circling about her*] Coa ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

My dear sir, I prefer to tell you at once that if it is for my benefit you are doing that ——

CHANTECLER

[*Stopping short.*] What?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The eye — the peculiar gait — the drooping wing — the "Coa ——"

CHANTECLER

But I ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You do it all very nicely, I admit; only, it has not the very slightest effect upon me!

CHANTECLER

[*Slightly abashed.*] Madam ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh, I understand, of course. We are the illustrious Cock! Not a Hen in the world but preens her feathers in the hope — the very touching hope, certainly — of offering us a moment's distraction, some day, between two songs. We are so sure of ourself that we never hesitate, not even when the lady is a visitor, and not quite the ordinary short-kirtled Hen whom one can engage without further ceremony by such advances ——

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I do not bestow my affections quite so lightly. For my taste, anyhow, you are altogether too frankly Cock of the Walk!

CHANTECLER

Too ——?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Spoiled! The only Cock to my fancy would be a plain inglorious Cock to whom I should be all in all.

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Love a celebrated Cock? I am not such a very woman!

CHANTECLER

But — well — still — We might, however, Madam, take a little stroll together!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Yes, like two friends.

CHANTECLER

Two friends.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Two chickens.

CHANTECLER

Very old!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Quickly.*] No, no — not old! Very ugly!

CHANTECLER

[*Quicklier still.*] Oh, no, not ugly! [*Coming nearer to her.*] Will you take a turn in the yard? — Accept my wing!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You shall show me the sights.

CHANTECLER

[*Stopping before the* CHICKENS' *drinking-trough.*] This, of course, is hideous. It is a model drinking-trough on the siphon principle, made of galvanised iron. But everything excepting that is charming, noble, time and weather worn, from the hen-house roof to the stable door ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Returning.*] The Guinea-hen is having a fit!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER, *looking about her.*] And so you live here untroubled, and have nothing to fear?

CHANTECLER

Nothing whatever. Because the owner is a vegetarian. An amazing man, a lover of animals. He calls them by names borrowed from the poets. The donkey there is Midas; the heifer, Io.

THE BLACKBIRD

The showman's on the job!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Indicating the* BLACKBIRD.] And that?

CHANTECLER

Our humorist.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What does he do?

CHANTECLER

Oh, he keeps busy!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Doing what?

CHANTECLER

Trying never to appear a fool, and that's hard work.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Possibly — but most unattractive! [*They move towards the back.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

[*With a glance at the* PHEASANT-HEN'S *scarlet breast.*] Size up the highfalutin' dame! — Get on to the waistcoat, will you?

CHANTECLER

[*Continuing the round.*] The hay-cock. The old wall. The wall, when I sing, is alive with lizards, the hay-cock bends to listen. I sing on the spot where you see the earth scratched up, and when I have sung, I drink in the bowl over there.

PHEASANT-HEN

Your song then is a matter of importance?

CHANTECLER

[*Seriously.*] The greatest.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Why?

CHANTECLER

That is my secret.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

If I should ask you to tell me?

CHANTECLER

[*Turning the conversation, and showing a pile of brush-wood, tied in bundles.*] My friends, the fagots.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Stolen from my forest! — So what they say is true? — you have a secret?

CHANTECLER

[*Drily.*] Yes, Madam.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I suppose it would be useless to insist ——

CHANTECLER

[*Climbing on the wall at the back.*] And from here you can see the remainder of the estate, to the edge of the kitchen-garden, where they ply at evening a serpent ending like a sprinkling can.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What? — This is all?

CHANTECLER

This is all.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And do you imagine the world ends at your vegetable-patch?

CHANTECLER

No.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Do you never, as you watch, far overhead, the wedge of the south-flying birds, dream of vaster horizons?

CHANTECLER

No.

PHEASANT-HEN

But all these things about you are dreary and poor and flat!

CHANTECLER

And I can never become used to the richness and wonder of these things!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

It is always the same, you must agree!

CHANTECLER

Nothing is ever the same, — nothing, — ever, — under the sun! And that because of the sun! — For *She* changes everything!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

She — Who?

CHANTECLER

Light, the universal goddess! That geranium planted by the farmer's wife is never twice the same red! And that old wooden shoe, spurting straw, what a sight, what a beautiful sight! And the wooden comb hanging among the farmer's smocks, with the green hair of the sward caught in its teeth! The pitchfork, stood in the corner, like a misbehaving child, dozing as he stands

and dreaming of the hay-fields! And the bowl and skittles there, — the trim-waisted skittles, shapely maids, whose orderly quadrilles Patou in his gambols clumsily upsets! The great worm-eaten bowl whose curved expanse some ant is always crossing, travelling with no less pride than famed explorers, — around her ball in 80 seconds! — Nothing, I tell you, is two instants quite the same! — And I, sweet lady, have been so susceptible ever, that a garden-rake in a corner, a flower in a pot, cast me long since into a helpless ecstasy, and that from gazing at a morning-glory I fell into the startled admiration which has made my eye so round!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Thoughtfully.*] One feels that you have a soul. — A soul then may find wherewithal to grow, so far from life and its drama, shut in by a farmyard wall with a cat asleep on it?

CHANTECLER

With power to see, capacity to suffer, one may come to understand all things. In an insect's death are hinted all disasters. Through a knot-hole can be seen the sky and marching stars!

THE OLD HEN

[*Appearing.*] None knows the heavens like the water in the well!

CHANTECLER

[*Presenting her to the* PHEASANT-HEN *before the basket-lid drops.*] My foster-mother!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Politely approaching.*] Delighted!

THE OLD HEN

[*Slyly winking at her.*] He's a fine Cock!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

He is a Cock, moreover, for whom that fact is not the only thing in the world!

CHANTECLER

[*Who has gone toward* PATOU.] There, my dear boy, is a Hen with whom one can have a bit of solid conversation!

SCENE SEVENTH

THE SAME, *the* GUINEA-HEN, *and the whole* POULTRY-YARD.

Cries outside, nearer and nearer, "Ah!——" *Enter all the* HENS *in tumult, preceded by the agitated* GUINEA-HEN.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*In his cage.*] The next course will be Guinea-hen!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Running to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Ah, my dear, my dear, my dear! — A beauty, a very beauty! — We have come to make your acquaintance, my dear!

[*General admiration,* "*Ah!*——" *The* PHEASANT-HEN *is surrounded. Conversation, cries, clucking.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Watching the* PHEASANT-HEN, *aside.*] How well she walks, with free and graceful gait! — [*He looks at the* HENS.] So differently from my Hens! [*Irritably, to the* HENS.] Ladies, you walk as if you had blisters! You walk as if you trod on your own eggs!

PATOU

No mistaking the symptoms! He is very much in love.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Presenting her son to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] The Guinea-cock, my son.

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

[*Looking admiringly at the* PHEASANT-HEN.] What a jolly shade of blond!

A HEN

[*Disparagingly.*] Like butter!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning, drily to the* HENS.] It is time you went indoors.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Amiably.*] So soon?

CHANTECLER

They retire early.

A HEN

[*A little mortified.*] Yes, we must turn in.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

They go in by a ladder!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Let us be great friends, my dear, shall we?

CHANTECLER

[*Looking at the* PHEASANT-HEN, *aside.*] Her sumptuous court-dress sets her apart from the rest, and removes her far above. — My Hens are dowdies!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To the* GUINEA-HEN, *excusing herself.*] I return to my forest home to-night.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*In excessive grief.*] So soon ——?

[*A shot in the distance.*]

PATOU

They are still after game.

THE GUINEA-HEN

You must stay.

CHANTECLER

[*Eagerly.*] That's it! Let us keep her a prisoner among us till to-morrow.

PHEASANT-HEN

But where can I spend the night?

PATOU

[*Indicating his kennel.*] There, in my bachelor's quarters.

PHEASANT-HEN

I? — Sleep beneath a roof?

PATOU

[*Insisting.*] Go in, I pray.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But you? What shall you do?

PATOU

I shall do very well!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Resigning herself.*] I will stay then until to-morrow.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*With piercing cries.*] Ah! Ah! But to-morrow, my dear! to-morrow ——

ALL

[*In alarm.*] What is it?

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

To-morrow is my mother's day!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Impetuously.*] My dear, would you care to come to-morrow, quite informally, and take a simple snail with us? The Peacock ——

CHANTECLER

[*Mounting the ladder, from whence he can inspect the scene.*] Quiet, if you please! Evening has blown its

smoke across the sky — [*In a tone of command.*] Is every one in his accustomed place?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Lower, to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] The Peacock is coming. We shall hold our little gathering among the currant-bushes.

CHANTECLER

Are the turkeys on their roost?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Same business.*] From five to six.

CHANTECLER

Are the ducks in their pointed house?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Same business.*] The Tortoise has kindly said we may expect her.

PHEASANT-HEN

Indeed?

CHANTECLER

[*On the last rung of the ladder.*] Is every one under cover? — Every chick under a wing?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Still insisting with the* PHEASANT-HEN *that she come on the morrow.*] The Tufted Hen has promised to bring the Cock. — [*To* CHANTECLER.] Charmed, I am sure.

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE TUFTED HEN

[*Looking out of the hen-house.*] You will come, won't you, dear?

CHANTECLER

No.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*At the foot of the ladder, looking up at him.*] Oh, but you will?

CHANTECLER

Why?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Because you said "No!" to the other!

CHANTECLER

[*Wavering.*] Ah!

PATOU

Humph! I beseech you ——

CHANTECLER

[*Still wavering.*] I ——

PATOU

Humph! He is weakening. — They will make him pay dear if he yields!

THE OLD HEN

[*Appearing.*] Make a reed into a pipe and play a tune upon it! [*The basket-lid drops.*]

[*Night is thickening.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Still hesitating.*] I ——

A VOICE

Let us go to sleep ——

THE TURKEY

[*On his roost, solemnly.*] *Quandoque dormitat* ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*In his cage.*] Dormittimus!

CHANTECLER

[*Very firmly to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] I will not go. Good night.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Slightly offended.*] Good night! [*With a curt hop she enters the dog-kennel.*]

PATOU

[*Falling asleep, stretched in front of his kennel.*] Let us sleep until the sky grows pink — pink as — as — a puppy's tummy ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Dropping off.*] From five to six ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Likewise dropping off.*] Tew — tew —— [*He nods.*] tew ——

CHANTECLER

[*Still at the top of the ladder.*] All sleeps. — [*He spies a* CHICK *stealing out.*] Is that a chick I see? — [*Springing after him and driving him in.*] Let me catch you! — [*In driving back the* CHICK, *he finds himself near the kennel. He calls very softly.*] Pheasant-hen!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Lost among the straw, sleepily.*] What do you want?

CHANTECLER

[*After a moment's hesitation.*] Nothing. — Nothing! [*He goes back to the top of his ladder.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Shall I be able to sleep, I wonder ——

PATOU

[*Falling sound asleep.*] A puppy's tum ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Indistinctly, overcome by slumber.*] To sleep under a roof? — I, with my gypsy tastes?

CHANTECLER

I am going in. [*He disappears in the hen-house. He is heard saying in a dreamy voice.*] It is time to shut my — my ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a last effort.*] ——gyp——sy —— tastes. — [*Her head nods and disappears among the straw.*]

CHANTECLER

[*His voice, sleepier and fainter.*] —— to shut my eyes ——

[*Silence. He sleeps. Two green eyes are seen suddenly kindling at the top of the wall.*]

THE CAT

And to open mine!

[*Immediately two more yellow eyes shine forth from the darkness above the hay-cock.*]

A VOICE

And mine!

[*Two more yellow eyes on the wall.*]

ANOTHER VOICE

And mine!

[*Two more yellow eyes.*]

ANOTHER VOICE

And mine!

SCENE EIGHTH

The POULTRY-YARD *asleep. The* CAT *awake. Three* SCREECH-OWLS, *later the* MOLE *and the* VOICE *of the* CUCKOO.

FIRST VOICE

Two green eyes?

THE CAT

[*Sitting up on the wall, and looking at the other phosphorescent eyes.*] Six golden eyes?

FIRST VOICE

On the wall?

THE CAT

On the rick? — [*He calls.*] Owls!

THE OWLS

Cat!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Waking up.*] What's this?

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*To the* CAT.] Great plot against him!

THE CAT

To-night?

THE THREE OWLS

To-night, too-whit!

THE CAT

Pfitt! — Where?

THE OWLS

The hollies, too-whoo!

THE CAT

What o'clock?

THE OWLS

Eight, too-whit! too-whoo!

FIRST OWL

Bats weaving soft black snares of flight ——

THE CAT

Are they with us?

THE THREE OWLS

They are!

FIRST OWL

Mole, burrowing from nether to upper night ——

THE CAT

Is she with us?

THE THREE OWLS

She is!

THE CAT

[*Talking toward the house-door.*] You, strike your eight strokes bravely, Cuckoo of the little clock!

THE SCREECH-OWL

Is he with us?

THE CAT

He is! — And I am pleased to tell you, silent night-watchers, that some of the day-birds are likewise with us.

THE TURKEY

[*Coming forward surrounded by a number of the barn-yard constituents, obsequiously.*] So it is settled for this evening, dear Round Eyes? You will be there?

THE OWLS

We will be there! All the Round Eyes of the neighbourhood will be there!

THE BLACKBIRD

That's a show I'd like to see!

PATOU

[*In his sleep.*] Grrrrrr ——

THE CAT

[*To the startled* NIGHT-BIRDS.] The dog is dreaming. — He growls in his sleep.

CHANTECLER

[*Inside the hen-house.*] Coa —

THE OWLS

[*Frightened.*] Himself!

THE TURKEY

Fly!

FIRST OWL

No need. The night is dark. We can vanish by merely closing our eyes.

[*They shut their luminous eyes. Darkness.* CHANTECLER *appears at the top of the ladder.*]

CHANTECLER

[*To the* BLACKBIRD.] Did you hear anything, Blackbird?

THE BLACKBIRD

I did, indeed, old chap.

THE OWLS

[*Frightened.*] What's this?

THE BLACKBIRD

A black conspiracy ——

CHANTECLER

Ah?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*With melodramatic emphasis.*] Against you! — Tremble!

CHANTECLER

[*Going in again, unalarmed.*] Joker!

THE OWLS

He has gone in.

THE BLACKBIRD

I have betrayed no one!

AN OWL

The Blackbird then is with us?

THE BLACKBIRD

No — but may I come and look on?

AN OWL

A Night-bird never eats a black bird. You can come.

THE BLACKBIRD

The password?

THE OWL

Terror and Talons!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Putting her head out of the dog-kennel.*] I can't breathe in that stifling, low-roofed little house, and — [*Catching sight of the* NIGHT-BIRDS.] Oh! — [*She darts aside, behind the kennel, and watches.*]

THE OWLS

Hush! [*They close their eyes.* THE CAT *does the same. After a time, hearing no further sound, they open them again.*] It was nothing. Let us be off.

THE GROUP OF THE DISAFFECTED

[*With fawning obsequiousness to the* NIGHT-BIRDS.] Success to you, Owls, — success!

THE OWL

Thanks! But how is it that you are with us?

THE CAT

Ah, night brings out what daylight will not own to! I do not like the Cock because the Dog does. — There you have it!

THE TURKEY

I do not like him, for the reason that having known him as a Chick I cannot admit him as a Cock!

A DUCK

I do not like the Cock because, not being web-footed, he marks his passage by a track of stars!

A CHICKEN

I do not like the Cock because I'm such a homely bird!

ANOTHER CHICKEN

I do not like the Cock because he has his picture painted in purple on all the plates!

ANOTHER CHICKEN

I do not like the Cock because on all the steeples he has his statue in gilt-bronze!

AN OWL

[*To a big overgrown* CHICKEN.] Well, well! — And you, Capon?

THE CAPON

[*Drily.*] I do not like the Cock!

THE CUCKOO

[*Beginning to strike eight inside the house.*] Cuckoo!

FIRST OWL

The hour!

CUCKOO

Cuckoo!

SECOND OWL

Let us go!

THE CUCKOO

Cuckoo!

FIRST OWL

The moon!

THE CUCKOO

Cuckoo!

FIRST OWL

Silently cleave the blue air ——

THE CUCKOO

Cuckoo!

THE MOLE

[*Suddenly pushing up through the ground.*] —— the dark earth!

FIRST OWL

There comes the Mole!

THE CUCKOO

Cuckoo!

FIRST OWL

[*To the* MOLE.] And you, why do you hate him?

THE MOLE

I hate him because I have never seen him!

THE CUCKOO

Cuckoo!

FIRST OWL

And you, Cuckoo, do you know why you hate him?

THE CUCKOO

[*On the last stroke.*] Because he does not have to be wound up! Cuckoo!

FIRST OWL

And we do not love ——

SECOND OWL

[*Hurriedly.*] We are keeping the others waiting ——

ALL

—— the Cock, because ——

[*They fly off. Silence.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Coming slowly from behind the kennel.*] I am beginning to love him!

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT SECOND

THE MORNING OF THE COCK

Wild hillside, moss-grown and ferny, overlooking a valley with scattered villages and winding river. Ruined wall, fragment of some vanished terrace. Gigantic chestnut tree, rank hollies and foxgloves. Litter suggesting neglected corner of a park: gardening implements lying on the ground, fagots, broken flower-pots.

SCENE FIRST

The NIGHT-BIRDS, *of all sorts and sizes, form a great circle, perching in tiers on the branches, the briers, the stones; the* CAT *crouches in the grass; the* BLACKBIRD *hops hither and thither on a fagot.*

At the rise of the curtain the NIGHT-BIRDS *are discovered, motionless, black shapes with closed eyes. The* GRAND DUKE *is perched upon a tree branch above the rest. The* SCREECH-OWL'S *phosphorescent eyes alone are wide open. He proceeds with the roll-call, and at every name two great round eyes brighten in the dark.*

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Calling.*] Strix! (*Two eyes light up.*) Scops! (*Two more eyes light up.*) Grand-Duke! (*Two more eyes.*) Metascops! (*Two more eyes.*) Minor! (*Two more eyes.*)

ONE NIGHT-BIRD

[*To the other.*] The Great Bubo presides.

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Calling.*] Owl of the Wall! Of the Belfry! Of the Cloister! Of the Yew! (*At every name two more eyes have opened wide.*)

A NIGHT-BIRD

[*To another just arriving.*] The roll is called!

THE OTHER

I know. All there is to do is to open our eyes.

THE SCREECH-OWL

Asio! Nictea! Nyctalis! (*Three more pairs of eyes have opened.*) Brachyotus! (*No eye opening at the name, he repeats.*) Brachyotus!

ONE OF THE NIGHT-BIRDS

He will be here directly. He stopped to eat a linnet.

BRACHYOTUS

[*Arriving.*] Present!

THE SCREECH-OWL

Not one of them would miss, when the meeting relates to the Cock!

BRACHYOTUS

Not one!

THE SCREECH-OWL

Carine! (*Two eyes open.*) Caparacoch! (*No eye opening, he repeats emphatically.*) Ca-pa-ra-coch! — Well? — Well?

CAPARACOCH

[*Arriving out of breath, opens his eyes, faltering an excuse.*] I live a long way off!

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Drily.*] You should have started the earlier! (*Looking around.*) We are all present, I believe. (*Calling.*)

Flammeolus! And Flammeoline! (*All the eyes are now open.*)

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Solemnly.*] Before beginning, let us give, but not too loud, the cry which makes us all as one!

ALL

Long live the Night!

And in a weird, savage, hurried chorus, interspersed with hoots and flapping of wings, all talking together and rocking themselves in hideous glee:

THE GRAND-DUKE

Praise the Night, discreet, propitious,
When with wadded wing and muted
O'er the sleeping world we fly,
And the partridge in the bracken
Ne'er suspects the hovering presence
Till we pounce without a cry.

THE SCREECH-OWL

Praise the Night, convenient, secret,
When in slaughtering baby rabbits
We can do it at our ease,
Daub the grass with blood in comfort,
Spare the pains to look like heroes,
Be ourselves where no one sees!

AN OLD HORNED-OWL

Praise the density of darkness!

A Wood-Owl

The intensity of stillness
Letting crunching bones be heard!

A Barn-Owl

Freshness pleasantly contrasting
With the genial warmth of blood drops
Spurting from a strangled bird!

The Wood-Owl

Praise the black rock oozing terror!

The Screech-Owl

And the cross-roads where our screeches,
Furrowing the startled air,
Our demoniac yelling, hooting,
Make the hardened unbeliever
Cross himself and fall to prayer!

The Grand-Duke

Praise the snares of the great Weaver,
Night, whose only fault or weakness
Is her tolerance of stars!

The Screech-Owl

For spectators are not wanted
At the work of plucking fledglings —
Be they Jupiter and Mars!

The Grand-Duke

Praise the Night, when we take vengeance
On the goldfinch for his beauty,
On the titmouse for his grace!

When the darkness takes possession
Let them tremble, those confiding
  Hostages of Day's!

THE WOOD-OWL

For there is a choice in murder!

THE GRAND-DUKE

And the inkier the blackness
  All the clearer do we see
To select the whitest pigeon
In the dove-cote, and the bluest
  Blue jay on the shuddering tree!

THE BARN-OWL

Praise the hour and taste and relish
Of the eggs we suck, destroying
  Hopes of many a haughty line!

THE SCREECH-OWL

And the councils where in whispers
We prepare what shall resemble
  Accidents by every sign!

THE GRAND-DUKE

Praise the shadow's grim suggestions!
The advantage over others
  We inherit through their fright!

THE SCREECH-OWL

For our grisly cachinnations
Give the very eagle goose-flesh —

ALL TOGETHER

Praise our patroness, the Night!

THE GRAND-DUKE

And now let the Screech-Owl in his russet robe take the floor.

SEVERAL VOICES

Silence!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*On his fagot.*] What an awf'ly lovely evening party!

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Oratorically.*] Brethren of the Night ——

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*To the* OWL *next to him.*] The meeting-place seems to me particularly well chosen. The blackest spot, the moldiest tree. To the right, old postherds. To the left, in the dark between the hollies — the view!

THE SCREECH-OWL

Brethren of the Night! ——

AN OWL

There comes the Mole!

SEVERAL VOICES

Silence!

THE OWL

She must have taken, to come here, a route below the roots of the daisies ——

THE BLACKBIRD

The subway, what else?

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*To his neighbor.*] Is that the Blackbird?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Coming forward.*] Yes, your Grace. And the two agate balls over there are the Cat.

THE GRAND-DUKE

I can hear him licking his paws.

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Resuming.*] Brethren of the Night! Inasmuch as everybody here — and we plume ourselves upon it! — is possessed of the evil eye ——

ALL THE BIRDS

[*Chuckling and rocking in their peculiarly disgusting and characteristic fashion.*] Ha, ha!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Spreading his wings to demand silence.*] Hush! (*All return to their appalling stillness.*)

THE BLACKBIRD

My eye is merely roguish. I am here to look on, you know, without taking sides, — in the artist spirit, that's all.

AN OWL

If you are not taking sides, then you are siding with us!

THE BLACKBIRD

Oh, I say, what a primitive notion!

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Completing his sentence.*] Let us express ourselves with simple and direct malevolence: the Cock is a robber!

ALL

A robber! He robs us!

THE BLACKBIRD

Now, what the —— Robs you of what?

THE GRAND-DUKE

Of health! Gladness!

THE BLACKBIRD

How is that?

THE SCREECH-OWL

By his crowing!

THE GRAND-DUKE

His crowing brings on enlargement of the spleen and pericarditis! For it heralds ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping about.*] Oh, I see —— The light!

[*All make a violent motion in his direction; the* BLACKBIRD, *frightened, hides among the fagots.*]

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Emphatically.*] Never speak that word! When that word is spoken, Night at the horizon feels a crawling discomfort, a titillation underneath her wing.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Cautiously correcting himself.*] The brightness of ——

[*General start of dismay repeated; the* BLACKBIRD *again dodges behind the fagots.*]

AN OWL

[*Hurriedly.*] Never utter that horrible grating word, which so hatefully suggests the scratching of a match!

THE SCREECH-OWL

You should express yourself: The Cock heralds the folding back of the pall ——

THE BLACKBIRD

But the day ——

[*Start and threatening gesture from all.*]

ALL

[*In voices of unspeakable anguish.*] Not that word!

THE GRAND-DUKE

You must refer to it as "that which will be!"

THE BLACKBIRD

What difference does it make whether or not he heralds the ——

ALL

[*Stopping him.*] Ha!

THE BLACKBIRD

—— the folding back of the pall, since that which will be — will be!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*In tones of despair.*] Simple torture it is to hear a brazen throat forever reminding you of what you know to be only too true!

ALL

[*Writhing in pain.*] Too true! Too true!

THE GRAND-DUKE

He begins while the night is still pleasant and cool ——

CRIES ON ALL SIDES

He is a robber, a thief!

THE GRAND-DUKE

He cheats us!

ALL THE OWLS

He cheats us! Cheats us!

THE GRAND-DUKE

Of the good bit of night there still is left.

AN OWLET

He compels us to leave our posts beside the warrens ——

THE SCREECH-OWL

Our feasts of steaming flesh!

THE WOOD-OWL

The witches' routs where we ride perched on the fist of a hag!

THE GRAND-DUKE

After cock-crow an Owl is no longer in his normal state ——

THE SCREECH-OWL

He does evil in a hurry!

THE GRAND-DUKE

And bungles it in consequence!

THE OLD HORNED-OWL

As soon as the Cock has crowed all becomes temporary, provisional ——

THE BARN-OWL

Though the Night be still black, we are painfully aware of it growing less and less black!

THE SCREECH-OWL

When his metallic voice has cleft the night, we squirm like a worm in a fruit that is cut in two.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*On his fagot, mystified.*] The other Cocks, however ——

THE GRAND-DUKE

Their song creates no uneasiness. It is his song which must be silenced.

ALL THE NIGHT-BIRDS

[*Flapping their wings, in a long lament.*] Silenced! Silenced!

AN OWL

How can it be accomplished?

THE SCREECH-OWL

The Blackbird here has worked in our cause.

THE BLACKBIRD

Who — I?

THE SCREECH-OWL

Yes, you laughed at him.

ALL

[*Cackling.*] Ha, ha!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Spreading his wings.*] Hush! [*They resume their sinister stillness.*]

THE SCREECH-OWL

But his song has not acted any the less directly on our gall-bladders for the fun that has been made of him. He has grown stronger than ever since he was found ridiculous.

ALL

What shall we do?

THE SCREECH-OWL

The Peacock, that great booby ——

ALL

[*Cackling and rocking.*] Ha, ha!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Opening his wings.*] Hush! [*All instantly motionless.*]

THE SCREECH-OWL

Through the Peacock, likewise working in our cause, the Cock came out of fashion. But his song is just as

inconvenient, in fashion or out of it. He is all the more proudly uncompromising for no longer being in style.

ALL

What shall we do?

AN OWL

Cut his throat!

CRIES

Death to the Cock!

AN OWL

Death to that aristocrat posing as a democrat and socialist!

ANOTHER

With spurs on his heels, but a liberty cap on his head!

THE GRAND-DUKE

Night-birds all, arise!

[ALL, *arising with outspread wings and glaring eyes, increase enormously in size. The night appears doubly dark.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

[*With unabated lightness.*] Midnight to the fore!

THE SCREECH-OWL

Kill him! But how can we, when our eyes cease to see the moment he comes out? —

ALL

[*Wailing like an ancient chorus.*] Woe!

THE OLD HORNED-OWL

[*Craftily.*] How kill — from afar?

THE GRAND-DUKE

By means of what secret spring?

A VOICE

[*From the tree.*] Duke, may I lay a plan before the assembly?

THE GRAND-DUKE

Scops! Let us hear!

ALL

[*At sight of a small* OWL *dropping from a bough, and coming forward with tiny hops.*] Scops, dear little Scops!

SCOPS

[*Bowing before the* GRAND-DUKE.] You are aware, mighty Blind-by-day-and-seer-by-night, that in pleasant gardens up yonder hill a breeder of birds — termed aviculturist, raises for exhibitions — termed agricultural, the most magnificent Cocks of the most extraordinary varieties. Now, that great discoverer of rare birds, the Peacock, who, possessing a voice which pierces the ear-drum, cannot abide a voice which pierces the darkness — the Peacock, whose specialty it is to confer celebrity upon every strange beast ——

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*To his neighbour.*] From every strange region!

SCOPS

Cherishes the dream of presenting these same Cocks to-morrow, in the kitchen garden, at the ——

ALL TOGETHER

[*Laughing.*] Guinea-hen's!

SCOPS

And launching among her set these Birds whose glory will be the finishing blow to the glory of Chantecler.

THE BLACKBIRD

Flatten him out like a pan cake!

THE SCREECH OWL

But those Cocks are always locked in!

SCOPS

I am coming to that. This evening, when a maid, having entered their wire-netted close, was scattering corn in a golden shower, I started up suddenly from the hollow of a pollard willow, and the girl ——

AN OWL

[*To his neighbour.*] What a bright mind, our little Scops!

SCOPS

At sight of the ill-omened bird ——

ALL

[*Cackling and rocking.*] Ha, ha!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Spreading his wings.*] Hush! [*All suddenly still.*]

SCOPS

Fled, with one arm across her eyes! The cage was

left open, and the whole fantastic host will meet Chantecler to-morrow at the ——

ALL

[*With peals of laughter.*] Guinea-hen's!

THE BLACKBIRD

He is not going. He has refused.

SCOPS

The devil!

THE CAT

[*Quietly.*] Go on, Scops. He will be there.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Looking at him from a distance.*] What do you know about it, pocket panther?

THE CAT

I saw a Pheasant-hen exciting his admiration, and I saw that he would go.

THE BLACKBIRD

It's when you're sound asleep that you see everything!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*To* SCOPS.] Very well, then, let us suppose him going.

SCOPS

Chantecler, for all his fame, has retained his bluff country squire's frankness. When he sees this ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Prompting.*] Tea-fight ——

SCOPS

And the contortions of those ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Same business.*] Snobs ——

SCOPS

In the presence of those ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Same business.*] Big guns ——

SCOPS

He is sure to say things which they are equally sure to take up.

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Thrilled.*] And do you believe that a cock-fight ——?

SCOPS

Such is my fond hope.

THE CAT

But listen, Scops. Suppose Chantecler should win?

SCOPS

Know, Angora, that there will be among those fancy cocks a genuine game-cock, lean, with tawny wing, the same who ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Seeing the* OWLS *puff out their feathers for joy.*] Sensation among the audience!

SCOPS

The same who has defeated the most famous champions, — the White Pile. And as this victor in Flemish and English encounters wears at his heels, for the defter despatching of his enemy, two razors fastened there by the ingenuity of man, by to-morrow night Chantecler will be dead, and his eyes picked out of their sockets.

THE SCREECH-OWL

[*Enthusiastically.*] We will go and gloat over his corpse!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Risen to his full height, formidable.*] And his comb, which looked above his forehead like an incarnate bit of scarlet dawn, we will take his comb, — our dearest dream at length fulfilled! — and we will eat it!

ALL

[*With a yell, which ends in their ferocious cackling and rocking.*] And we will eat it, — eat it, ha, ha!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*Spreading his wings.*] Hush! [*Dead silence.*]

SCOPS

And after that ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping.*] It's quite a tidy proposition as it stands ——

SCOPS

What?

THE BLACKBIRD

Your scheme! By Jingo, if I were the sort of bird to take things solemnly, I would go straight to the Cock and tell him. But I will do nothing of the sort. [*He concludes, with four little hops.*] For I know — that all this — will turn out — beautifully!

SCOPS

[*Ironically.*] Beautifully indeed! [*He continues in growing excitement.*] And after that, if those absurd Cocks of far-fetched breeds have not by to-morrow evening gone back to their cages, we will eat them all, no longer good for anything!

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*In his neighbour's ear.*] And after that we will eat the Blackbird for dessert.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Who has not caught the last sentence.*] What did he say?

SCOPS

[*Quickly.*] Nothing! [*In a still increasing frenzy of glee.*] And after that ——

[*In the distance: Cock-a-doodle-doo! Instant silence.* SCOPS *stops short and collapses, as if mown down. All the puffed* OWLS *appear suddenly to have grown thin.*]

ALL

[*Looking at one another and blinking.*] What is it? What was that? [*They hastily spread their wings and call to one another for flight.*] Grand-Duke! Minor! Minimus!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping from one to the other.*] Going? So soon? Why, what's your hurry?

VOICE

[*Of one of the* NIGHT-BIRDS *calling to another.*] Nyctalis!

THE BLACKBIRD

It's hours before daybreak. Oceans of time, you have!

AN OWL

Asio, are you coming?

ANOTHER OWL

[*Calling.*] Nictea!

ANOTHER

[*Fluttering up to him.*] Yes, my dear!

[*They all stagger and trip over their wings.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

What makes them stumble?

THE NIGHT-BIRDS

[*Winking and blinking with marked evidences of pain.*] Oh, how it hurts! Ow! Ow!

THE BLACKBIRD

Lightning opthalmia, I declare!

[*One by one the* OWLS *fly off.*]

THE GRAND-DUKE

[*The last to go, spins on himself with a cry of pain and rage.*] How does he contrive, that pernicious Cock, to

have a voice that fairly puts out your eyes! [*He heavily flaps off.*]

VOICES OF THE NIGHT-BIRDS

[*In the distance.*] Strix!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Looking after them among the branches, and later in the blue space over the valley.*] They are calling one another!

VOICE IN THE DISTANCE

Scops!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Bending over the valley, where the dark wings are dwindling and fading.*] They wheel — waver — dip ——

VOICES

[*Dying in the distance.*] Owl of the Wall! Of the Belfry! Of the Yew!

THE BLACKBIRD

Gone! [*He looks about, gives a hop, and with an immediate return to levity.*] But it's supper-time. — Now for a bite of cold grasshopper! [*The* PHEASANT-HEN *suddenly flies over the brushwood tangle, dropping beside him.*] You!

SCENE SECOND

THE BLACKBIRD, THE PHEASANT-HEN, *later* CHANTECLER.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Panting, tragically earnest.*] I ran all the way.— You were there. — Oh, I am half dead with terror! — Well, you must have overheard their dreadful secret! You, his friend!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Cheerfully rummaging among the moss.*] Or the thigh of a katydid will do.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I was watching from a distance. I crouched in a ditch —— [*In an anguished voice.*] Well?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*In genuine surprise.*] Well, what?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Their conspiracy ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Calmly.*] It all went off very nicely.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What do you mean?

THE BLACKBIRD

The shadow was a correct and appropriate blue, and the Owls said perfectly characteristic things.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In wild alarm.*] Heavens, they plotted his death?

THE BLACKBIRD

His decease, which is not nearly so bad.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Don't smite your brow! In spite of the Screech-Owl's grave and self-important tone, I shouldn't wonder if it all amounted to very little.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Those Owls ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Are good enough in their various parts, but it's the old excessive style of acting.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I beg your pardon?

THE BLACKBIRD

Back numbers!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh?

THE BLACKBIRD

They have eyelashes, fancy, all the way round their eyes! It's too much of a good thing, really. — And that black plot, those desperately dark designs, all that belongs to the year one; you can see moss growing on its back!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Fluttering hither and thither feverishly.*] I am never

quite sure of understanding when a person is talking in fun.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Winking at her.*] No flies on your acting!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Surely you wouldn't be laughing if he were in danger? Those ruffians ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

Prattlers! Wooden Swords! Knights of Hot Air!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But Scops ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

A stuffed Owl!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And the Great Bubo ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

Just two ten-candle-power lamps, to be turned on and off with a switch, — crick-crack! And Flammeolus, two lamps likewise — but acetylene!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Bewildered by his imagery.*] And so ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

No, trembling Gypsy, there's not enough in this great plot to choke a flea withal!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Truly? I have been so horribly afraid ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Fear, I warn you, lovely Zingara, leads to dyspepsia! It's because he keeps his eye closed and buried in the sand that the ostrich has preserved his famous digestion!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

So it might seem.

THE BLACKBIRD

We have in these latter days bowed Tragedy respectfully out of the house!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But had we not best warn Chantecler, so that ——

THE BLACKBIRD

He would go instantly and challenge them. And then such a whetting of steel!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are right. So he would.

THE BLACKBIRD

On your principle, mad Gitana, an oak-gall could be made into a world.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You have much good sense.

THE BLACKBIRD

Daughter of the forest, I have.

CHANTECLER'S VOICE

[*Outside.*] Coa ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

[*Approaching on the left, between the hollies, calls from afar.*] Who is there?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

It is I!

CHANTECLER

[*Still from a distance.*] Alone?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*With a significant look at the* BLACKBIRD.] Yes, alone.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Understanding.*] I vanish — I am off to supper.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Low to the* BLACKBIRD.] And so ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Motioning her to be silent.*] Keep it dark! [*As he is leaving, by the right, in the manner of one giving an order to a waiter.*] Earwigs for one!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Low.*] It is wiser, you think, not to tell him?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Before disappearing among the flower-pots.*] Well, rather!

SCENE THIRD

THE PHEASANT-HEN, CHANTECLER.

CHANTECLER

[*Who has reached the* PHEASANT-HEN'S *side.*] Out so early?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

To see the daybreak.

CHANTECLER

[*With repressed emotion.*] Ah ——?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Teasingly.*] What troubles you?

CHANTECLER

I have had a wretched night.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

So sorry! [*A pause.*]

CHANTECLER

Are you going to the Guinea-hen's?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I stayed over solely for that purpose.

CHANTECLER

Ah, yes, I know. [*A pause.*] I dislike her extremely.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Come to her party.

CHANTECLER

No.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

As you please. Then we may as well say good-bye.

CHANTECLER

No.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Come to the Guinea-hen's. We shall have a chance to see something of each other there.

CHANTECLER

No.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are determined not to come?

CHANTECLER

I am coming — but I hate it.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Why?

CHANTECLER

It is weak.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

No, no! That is no great sign of weakness!

CHANTECLER

Ah ——?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Softly, coming closer to him.*] What would be showing a sweet, delightful, and fully masculine weakness ——

CHANTECLER

[*In alarm at her approach.*] What?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Would be to tell me your secret. Oh, just a wee bit!

CHANTECLER

[*With a start.*] The secret of my song?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Yes.

CHANTECLER

Golden Hen, my secret ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Coaxingly.*] Often from the edge of the woods I hear you in the first golden glimmer of day ——

CHANTECLER

[*Flattered.*] My song has reached your shapely little ear?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

It has!

CHANTECLER

[*Abruptly, moving away from her.*] My secret —— Never!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are not very gallant!

CHANTECLER

No — I am full of conflict and misery.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Languidly reciting.*] The Cock and the Pheasant-hen, a Fable ——

CHANTECLER

[*Half aloud.*] A Cock loved a Pheasant-hen ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And would not tell her anything ——

CHANTECLER

Moral ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

It was horrid of him!

CHANTECLER

[*Pressing close to her.*] Moral: Your dress has the fascinating rustle of silk!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Moral: I dislike familiarity! [*Withdrawing from him.*] Go home to your Hen of the plebeian petticoat!

CHANTECLER

[*Stamping.*] I shall be angry!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

No, no, don't be angry — Say "Coa ——"
[*They stand bill to bill.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Angrily.*] Coa ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

No, no! Say it nicely ——

CHANTECLER

[*In a long, tender coo.*] Coa ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Look at me without laughing. Your secret ——

CHANTECLER

Well?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are dying to tell it to me!

CHANTECLER

Yes, I feel that I shall tell, and I know I shall do ill in telling. And it's all because of the gold on her dainty little head! [*Going brusquely nearer to her.*] Shall you prove worthy, at least, of having been chosen? Is your breast true red to the core?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Now tell me!

CHANTECLER

Look at me, Pheasant-hen, and try, if indeed it be possible, try to recognise, by yourself, sign by sign, the vocation of which my body is the symbol. Guess, to begin with, at my destiny from my shape, and see how, curved like a sort of living hunting-horn, I am as much formed for sound to turn and gain volume within me, as the wild duck is formed to swim! — Wait! — Mark the fact that, impatient and proud, scratching up the earth with my claws, I appear always to be seeking something in the soil ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are seeking for grains of corn, seeds, I suppose.

CHANTECLER

Never! I have never looked for such things. I find them occasionally, into the bargain, but disdainfully I give them to my Hens.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Well, then, in your perpetual scratching, what is it you are looking for?

CHANTECLER

The right spot! For always before singing I carefully choose my stand. Pray, observe ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

True, and then you ruffle your feathers.

CHANTECLER

I never start to sing until my eight claws, after clearing a space of weeds and stones, have found the soft, dark turf underneath. Then, placed in direct contact with the good earth, I sing! — And that is already half the mystery, Pheasant-hen, half the mystery of my song, which is not of those songs one sings after composing them, but is received straight from the native soil, like sap! And the time above all when that sap arises in me, — the hour, briefly, in which I have genius, in which I can never doubt I have! — is the hour when dawn falters on the boundaries of the dark sky. Then, filled with the same quivering as leaves and grass, thrilled to the very tips of my wing quills, I feel myself a chosen instrument. I accentuate my curve of a hunt-

ing-horn, Earth speaks in me as in a conch, and ceasing to be an ordinary bird, I become the mouthpiece, in some sort official, through which the cry of the earth escapes toward the sky!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

And that cry which rises from the earth, that cry is such a cry of love for the light, is such a deep and frenzied cry of love for the golden thing we call the Day, and that all thirst to feel again: the pine on its bark, the tortuous roots in woodland paths on their mosses, the feather-grass on each delicate spray, the tiniest pebble in its tiniest mica flake; it is so wonderfully the cry of all that misses and mourns its colour, its reflection, its flame, its coronet, its pearl; the beseeching cry of the dew-washed meadow begging for a wee rainbow at every grass-tip, of the forest begging a burst of fire at the end of each gloomy avenue; that cry which mounts to the sky through me is so greatly the cry of all that feels itself in disgrace, plunged in a sunless pit, deprived of light without knowing for what offence; is the cry of cold, the cry of fear, the cry of weariness, of all that night disables or disarms; the rose shivering alone in the dark, the hay wanting to be dried and go to the mow, the sickle forgotten out of doors by the reaper and fearing it will rust in the grass, the white things dismayed at not looking white; is so greatly the cry of the innocent among beasts, who have nothing to conceal, of the brook fain to show its crystal clearness; and even

— for thy very works, O Night, disown thee! — of the puddle longing to glisten, the mud longing to become earth again, by drying; it is so greatly the magnificent cry of the field impatient to feel its wheat and barley growing, of the blossoming tree mad for still more blossoms, of the green grapes craving a purple side; of the bridge waiting for footsteps, for shadows of birds among shadows of branches; the voice of all that yearns to sing, to drop the garb of mourning, live again, serve again, be a brink, be a bourn, a sun-warm seat, a stone glad to comfort with warmth the hand touching, or the insect overcrawling it; finally, it is so greatly the cry toward the light of all Beauty, all Health, all which wishes, in sunshine and joy, to see its work while doing it, and do it to be seen — And when I feel that vast call to the Day arising within me, I so expand my soul to make it more sonorous, by making it more spacious, that the great cry may still be increased in greatness; before giving it, I withold it in my soul a moment so piously; then, when, to expel it, I contract my soul, I am so convinced of accomplishing a great act, I have such faith that my song will make night crumble like the walls of Jericho ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Frightened.*] Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

And sounding its victory beforehand, my song springs forth so clear, so proud, so peremptory, that the horizon, seized with a rosy trembling —— *obeys!*

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

I sing! Vainly Night offers to compromise, offers a dubious twilight — I sing again! And suddenly ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

I fall back, blinded by the red light bathing me, dazzled at having, I, the Cock, made the Sun to rise!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Then the whole secret of your song ——?

CHANTECLER

Is that I dare assume that the East without me must rest in idleness! I sing, not to hear the echo repeat, a shade fainter, my song! I think of light and not of glory! Singing is my fashion of waging war and bearing witness. And if my song is the proudest of songs, it is that I sing clearly to make the day rise clear!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What he says sounds slightly mad! — You are responsible for the rising of ——

CHANTECLER

That which opens flower, eye, soul, and window! Certainly! My voice dispenses light! And when the sky ' · grey, the reason is that I have sung badly.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But when you sing by day?

CHANTECLER

I am practising, or else promising the ploughshare, the hoe, the harrow, the scythe, not to neglect my duty of waking them.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But what wakens you?

CHANTECLER

The fear of forgetting.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And you believe that at the sound of your voice the whole world is suffused ——?

CHANTECLER

I have no clear idea of the whole world. But I sing for my own valley, and desire that every Cock may do the same for his.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Still ——

CHANTECLER

But here I stand, explaining, perorating, and forgetting altogether to make my dawn.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

His dawn!

CHANTECLER

Ah, what I say sounds mad? I will make the dawn

before your very eyes! And the wish to please you adding its ardour to the ordinary forces of my soul, I shall rise in singing, as I feel, to unusual heights, and the dawn will rise more fair to-day than ever it rose before!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

More fair?

CHANTECLER

Assuredly, — in just the measure that strength is added to the song by the knowledge of listeners, boldness to the exploit by the consciousness of lovely watching eyes —— [*Taking his stand upon a hillock at the back, overlooking the valley.*] Now, Madam!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Gazing at his outline against the sky.*] How beautiful he is!

CHANTECLER

Look attentively at the sky. Already it has paled. The reason is that a short while back, with my earliest crow I ordered the sun to stand in readiness just below the horizon.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

He is so beautiful that what he says almost seems possible!

CHANTECLER

[*Talking toward the horizon.*] Ha, Sun, I feel you just behind there, stirring — and I laugh with pride and joy amidst my scarlet wattles —— [*Rising on tiptoe suddenly, in a voice of startling loudness.*] Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What great breath lifts his breast-feathers?

CHANTECLER

[*Toward the east.*] Obey! — I am the Earth, and I am Labour! My comb is the pattern of a forge fire, and the voice of the furrow rises to my throat! [*Whispering mysteriously.*] Yes, yes, month of July ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

To whom is he speaking?

CHANTECLER

You shall have it earlier than April! [*Bending to right and left, encouragingly.*] Yes, Bramble! — Yes, Brake!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

He is magnificent!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] You see, I must at all times remember —— [*Stroking the earth with his wing.*] Yes, dear Grass! — remember the humble prayers whose interpreter I become. [*Talking to invisible things.*] The golden ladder? — I understand! that you may all dance on it together!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

To whom are you promising a ladder?

CHANTECLER

To the Motes — Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Watching the sky and landscape.*] A shiver of blue runs across the thatched roofs. — A star went out just then ——

CHANTECLER

No, it veiled itself. Even by daylight the stars are there.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You do not extinguish them?

CHANTECLER

I extinguish nothing! But you shall see how great I am at kindling!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh, I see a dawning of ——

CHANTECLER

What do you see?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The blue is no longer blue!

CHANTECLER

I told you! It is already green!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The green is turning to orange ——

CHANTECLER

You will have been the first this morning to see the transformation!

[*The distant plain takes on velvety purplish hues.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

It all seems to end in leagues of purple heather.

CHANTECLER

[*Whose crow is beginning to tire.*] Cock-a-doo ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh — yellow among the pine trees!

CHANTECLER

Gold it ought to be, — gold!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And pearly grey ——

CHANTECLER

It shall be white! — I haven't done it yet! Cock-a-doodle-doo! — It's very bad so far, but I won't give up!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Every hollow in every tree is pink as a wild rose ——

CHANTECLER

[*With growing enthusiasm.*] Since love lends me strength in addition to faith, I say the Day to-day shall be more beautiful that the Day! — Do you see? Do you see the eastern sky at my voice dappling itself with light?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Lured along and half persuaded by the madness of the* COCK.] Such a thing might be, after all, since love is involved in the mystery!

CHANTECLER

Resume, horizon, at my command, your fringe of little poplars!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Bending over the valley.*] There emerges from the shadow, gradually, a world of your creation ——

CHANTECLER

Sacred things you are witnessing — To sacred things I am initiating you! — Define your outlines, distant hills! Pheasant-hen, do you love me?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

We shall always love to be in the secret of the Makers of Dawn!

CHANTECLER

You help me to sing better. Come closer. Collaborate!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Springing to his side.*] I love you!

CHANTECLER

Every word you whisper in my ear shall be translated into sunshine for all the world to see!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I love you!

CHANTECLER

Say it again, and I will gild that mountain suddenly!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Wildly.*] I love you! — Let me see you gild it!

CHANTECLER

[*In his greatest, most splendid manner.*] Cock-a-doodle-doo!

[*The mountain turns golden.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Pointing to the lower ranges, still purple.*] But the hills?

CHANTECLER

Each in its turn. To the highest peaks belong the earliest rays! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Ah! — across yonder drowsing slope a stealing gleam ——

CHANTECLER

[*Joyously.*] I dedicate it to you!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The distant villages are coming into view.

CHANTECLER

Cock-a —— [*His voice breaks.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are weary!

CHANTECLER

[*Stiffening himself.*] I refuse to be! [*Wildly.*] Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Exhausted!

CHANTECLER

Do you see those tatters of mist still clinging? Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You will kill yourself!

CHANTECLER

I only live, dear, when I am killing myself giving great splendid cries!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Pressing close to his side.*] I am proud of you!

CHANTECLER

[*With emotion.*] Your head bows ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I listen to the Day arising in your breast! I delight to hear first in your lungs what by-and-by will be purple and gold on the mountain sides!

CHANTECLER

[*While the little distant houses begin to smoke in the dawn.*] I dedicate to you moreover those reawakened farmsteads. Man offers trinkets, I — wreaths and plumes of smoke!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking off.*] I can see your work growing, — growing in the distance.

CHANTECLER

[*Looking at her.*] I can see it in your eyes!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Over the meadows ——

CHANTECLER

On your throat —— [*In a smothered voice.*] Oh, it is exquisite!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What?

CHANTECLER

I am at once doing my duty, and making you more fair. I am gilding my valley, while brightening your wing. [*Tearing himself from love, and dashing toward the right.*] But the shadow still fights all along the line of retreat. There is much to be done over there! Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking up at the sky.*] Oh, look!

CHANTECLER

[*Looking too, sadly.*] How can I prevent it? The morning star is fading out!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a tone of regret for the little bright spark which the growing light must necessarily quench.*] It is fading out ——

CHANTECLER

Alas! — But shall we therefore despond? [*And tearing himself from melancholy, he springs toward the left.*] There is still much to do over here. Cock-a —— [*At this point the crowing of other* COCKS *ascends from the*

valley. CHANTECLER *listens, then softly.*] Hark! Do you hear them now?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Who dare ——?

CHANTECLER

The other Cocks.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Bending above the plain.*] They are singing in the rosy light ——

CHANTECLER

Yes, they believe in the light as soon as they see it.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

They sing all in a haze of blue ——

CHANTECLER

I sang in total blackness. My song rose from the cheerless shade, and was the first to rise. It is when Night prevails that it's fine to believe in the Light!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

How dare they sing when you are singing?

CHANTECLER

Let them sing! Their songs acquire significance from mingling with mine, and their tardy but numerous cries unconsciously hasten the flight of the dark. [*Straightening upon his hillock, he calls to the distant* COCKS.] Now, all together!

CHANTECLER AND ALL THE COCKS

Cock-a-doodle-doo!

CHANTECLER

[*Alone, with familiar cordiality.*] Forward, forward, boldly, Day!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Beside him, stamping her feet.*] Boldly, Day!

CHANTECLER

[*Crying encouragements to the Light.*] Yes, there, there before you, is a roof for you to gild! Come, come, a touch of green on that patch of waving hemp!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Beside herself with excitement.*] A glimmer of white on that road!

CHANTECLER

A wash of blue on the river!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a great cry.*] The Sun! Look, the Sun!

CHANTECLER

There he is, I can see him, but we must hale him from that grove! [*And both of them, moving backward together, appear to be drawing something after them.* CHANTECLER, *prolonging his crow as if to drag up the* SUN *by it.*] Coooooooo ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Shouting above* CHANTECLER'S *crow.*] There he comes ——

CHANTECLER

—— oock-a ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

—— climbing ——

CHANTECLER

—— doodle ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

—— above ——

CHANTECLER

—— doooooo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

—— the poplars!

CHANTECLER

[*In a last, dry-throated, desperate crow.*] Cock-a-doodle-doo! [*Both stagger, suddenly flooded with light.*] It is done! [*He adds, in a tone of satisfaction.*] A proper Sun, — a giant! [*He totters toward a mossy rise and drops against it.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Running to him, while all grows brighter and brighter.*] One song now to greet the beautiful rising Sun!

CHANTECLER

[*Very low.*] I have no voice left. I spent it all. [*Hearing the other* COCKS *crowing in the valley, he adds gently.*] It matters not. He has the songs and praises of the others.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Surprised.*] What? After he appears, he hears no more from you?

CHANTECLER

No more.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Indignant.*] But in that case, perhaps the Sun believes the other Cocks have made him rise?

CHANTECLER

It matters not.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But ——

CHANTECLER

Hush! Come to my heart and let me thank you. Never has there been a lovelier dawn.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But what will repay you for all your pains?

CHANTECLER

Echoes of awakening life down in the valley! [*Confused living noises are beginning to mount from below.*] Tell me of them. I have not the strength to listen for myself.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Runs to the top of the rise, and listens.*] I hear a finger knocking against the rim of a brazen sky ——

CHANTECLER

[*With closed eyes.*] The Angelus.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Other strokes, which sound like a human Angelus after the divine ——

CHANTECLER

The forge-hammer.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Lowing, — then a song ——

CHANTECLER

The plow.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Continuing to listen.*] Sounds as of a bird's nest fallen into the little street ——

CHANTECLER

[*With growing emotion.*] The school!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Imps of whom I catch no glimpse buffet one another in the water ——

CHANTECLER

Women washing linen.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And suddenly, on all sides, what are they — iron locusts rubbing their wings together?

CHANTECLER

[*Half rising, in the fulness of pride.*] Ah, if scythes are whetting, the reapers will soon be harvesting the golden grain! [*The sounds increase and mingle: bells, hammers, washer-women's wooden spades, laughter, singing, grinding of steel, cracking of whips.*] All at work! And I have done that! — Oh, impossible! — Pheasant-hen,

help me! This is the dreadful moment! [*He looks wildly about him.*] I made the sunrise! I did! Wherefore? And how? And where? No sooner does my reason return — than I go mad! For I who believe I have power to rekindle the celestial gold — I — well — oh, it is dreadful ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What is?

CHANTECLER

I am humble-minded, modest! You will never tell?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

No, no!

CHANTECLER

You promise? Ah! let my enemies never know!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Moved.*] Chantecler!

CHANTECLER

I feel myself unworthy of my glory. Why was I chosen, even I, to drive out black night? No sooner have I brought the heavens to a white glow, than the pride which lifted me aloft drops dead. I fall to earth. What, I, so small, I made the immeasurable dawn? And having done this, I must do it again? Nay, but I cannot! Nay, it would be vain! Never need I attempt it! Despair overtakes me — Comfort me, love!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Tenderly.*] My own!

CHANTECLER

Such a burden of responsibility resting upon me! That inspiring breath which I await when I scratch in the sand, will it come again? I feel the whole future depending upon an incomprehensible something which might perchance fail me! Do you understand now the anguish gnawing me? Ah, the swan is certain, by bending his neck, to find under water the grasses he delights in; the eagle, when he swoops from the blue, sure of falling upon his prey; and you are ever sure of finding in the earth the well supplied nests of the ants, — but I, for whom my own work remains a mystery, I, possessed ever by the fear of the morrow, am I sure of finding my song in my heart?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Clasping him with her wings.*] Surely, you will find it, surely!

CHANTECLER

Yes, talk to me like that. I listen, I heed you. You must believe me when I believe, and not when I doubt. Tell me again ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are beautiful!

CHANTECLER

About that I care very little.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And you sang beautifully!

CHANTECLER

Say that I sang badly, but tell me that it is I who make ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Indeed, indeed, I admire you beyond all bounds and measure!

CHANTECLER

No, — tell me that what I told you is true ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What?

CHANTECLER

That it is I who make ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Yes, my glorious Beloved, yes, it is you who make the dawn appear!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Suddenly appearing.*] Well, well, old man!

SCENE FOURTH

THE SAME, THE BLACKBIRD

CHANTECLER

The Blackbird! — My secret!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Bowing with every sign of admiration.*] Allow me to ——

CHANTECLER

That inveterate mocker! [*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Leave us not alone! My soul is still open — his mockery would enter in!

THE BLACKBIRD

Ripping!

CHANTECLER

Where have you come from?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Indicating an empty overturned flower-pot.*] From that flower-pot.

CHANTECLER

But how ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

I was having my early snack cozily in the earthenware retreat you see, when suddenly —— oh, allow me to express at once the amazement, the admiration ——

CHANTECLER

Eavesdropping inside a pot! How can you stoop to ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Hang the pot! I've had a sensation! I tell you I was wild! My feet were doing such a horn-pipe I had trouble to keep my eye steady at the peep-hole.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You could see us?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Showing the hole at the bottom of the flower-pot.*] Could

I see you! Yonder stump of red cone has exactly the black hole to let through my yellow bill. Apologies, — but it was too tempting! A bird of taste, I am.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

For the sake of this sincere tribute, I forgive you all the rest!

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Coming and going in excitement.*] Oh, wonderful, and again wonderful, and then again wonderful! — Hear me rant!

CHANTECLER

[*Amazed.*] What, is it possible that you ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

Am I given to gush? This time, old man, it's the genuine article, Enthusiasm with a capital E!

CHANTECLER

Are you in earnest?

THE BLACKBIRD

Must I send you a blankety carrier-pigeon with the news? — That Cock and that crow, — oh, my soul! — And then the day breaking, — oh, my stars!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER.] There seems to be no reason, dear, why I should not leave you alone together.

CHANTECLER

But where are you going?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Slightly ashamed of her own frivolity.*] I am going to the ——

THE BLACKBIRD

The Guinea-hen's Day he's just given the finishing touches to!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Must I go too?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Tenderly.*] No, after rising to such heights, I think you may be excused from the Guinea-hen's at home!

CHANTECLER

[*With a touch of sadness.*] You, however, are going?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Gaily.*] I want to show off your sunshine on my dress! I will be back directly. Wait for me here.

THE BLACKBIRD

Yes, much better keep out of the way.

CHANTECLER

[*Looking at him.*] Wherefore?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Quickly.*] Nothing! [*Falling into fresh ecstasies.*] Oh, this blessed Cock of ours!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] You will not be long?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The merest moment. [*Low to him before leaving.*] You see, even the Blackbird is impressed! [*She flies off.*]

SCENE FIFTH

CHANTECLER, THE BLACKBIRD

CHANTECLER

[*Coming back to the* BLACKBIRD.] And so that habitual skeptical sneer ——?

THE BLACKBIRD

Wiped out! My satirical whistling, as the Dog called it, now expresses pure admiration. Listen, like this: [*He whistles admiringly.*] Tew! — How is that? — Tew-tew! [*Nodding soberly.*] That's all right!

CHANTECLER

[*Innocently.*] You are not such a bad fellow, after all. I said so to the Dog.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*With profound conviction.*] You're a wonderful old boy!

CHANTECLER

[*Modestly.*] Oh!

THE BLACKBIRD

To come it over the Hens —— [*He again whistles admiringly.*] make them believe that he engineers the dawn! [CHANTECLER *starts.*] A simple idea, but it took you to get on to it! Brother, I believe you were hatched in Columbus' egg!

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE BLACKBIRD

All other Don Juans are donkeys beside you! Says he to himself: Make the daybreak to impress little pheasant-hens! And does it, too — succeeds!

CHANTECLER

[*In a smothered voice.*] Be still!

THE BLACKBIRD

Neat, the little roof which must be gilded! Complete, the ladder for the Motes!

CHANTECLER

[*In a spasm of pain.*] Be still!

THE BLACKBIRD

And the access of modesty, a sweet little final touch! I kiss my hand to you! Oh, he knows how — no mistake, he knows —

CHANTECLER

[*Constraining himself, in a curt voice.*] The Dawn? Certainly, I know her. I think I may claim that honor!

THE BLACKBIRD

You precious fakir! Don't you consider you have succeeded?

CHANTECLER

In bringing on the day? Yes, certainly, I have succeeded. Admirably, in this case.

THE BLACKBIRD

Oh, you do it so well! How awfully well he does it!

CHANTECLER

Making the light? Of course, I have done it so often! I am used to it. The Sun obeys me.

THE BLACKBIRD

So, worthy Joshua! You feel the dawn coming, and then you crow! For lightness of touch and richness of invention, give us a lyric poet!

CHANTECLER

[*Bursting forth.*] Wretch!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Surprised.*] Are you keeping it up with me? [*Winking.*] Oh, we know how the thing is done!

CHANTECLER

You may know, — not I! I just open my heart and sing!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping about.*] That's the idea!

CHANTECLER

Blackbird, laugh at everything besides, but not at that, if you love me!

THE BLACKBIRD

I love you!

CHANTECLER

[*Bitterly.*] With half a heart!

THE BLACKBIRD

Can't say a word about his *Fiat Lux?*

CHANTECLER

Not that! Not that!

THE BLACKBIRD

Old man, it's not my fault that I'm no gull.

CHANTECLER

[*Looking after him as he hops about.*] He cannot keep still long enough, I suppose, to let the sacred truth sink in. [*Trying to stop him in his hopping.*] You behold the agony of emotion shaking me. No more baffle and keep me off with words!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping past him.*] Catch, if you can, and convince me!

CHANTECLER

[*Imploring.*] It's a matter of life — my profoundest life! Oh, convince you I must, if only for a second! I feel the holy impulse to struggle with your soul!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping past him.*] Do you!

CHANTECLER

In solemn earnest, at the bottom of your heart, you did — did you not? — believe me?

THE BLACKBIRD

I believe you!

CHANTECLER

[*With pressing anguish.*] You must in some manner be aware of the dreadful cost to me of that song? Come, use your reason. To sing as you heard me sing, you must realise that I needed ——

THE BLACKBIRD

A whopping muscle and a tolerable nerve!

CHANTECLER

No, let us not make light of serious things, responsible winged creatures that we are!

THE BLACKBIRD

Let us go in for heavy-weight truths, by all means!

CHANTECLER

But can't you see that to look straight at the sun, rising before his eyes by the exertions of his larynx, one must have at the same time ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Stentorian lungs and the eyes of a lynx! [*He hops out of the way.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Controlling himself.*] No, I cannot give up the hope of winning this soul to the truth! [*With desperate patience.*] Come, now, have you any conception, unhappy bird, of what dawn actually is?

THE BLACKBIRD

I should say so! It's the time of day when fluffy Aurora gets busy, as it were, and plays ball!

CHANTECLER

But what do you say when you see the dawn shining upon the mountains?

THE BLACKBIRD

Mountains, I say, what on earth are you blushing about?

CHANTECLER

And what do you say when you hear me singing in the furrow long before the cricket is awake?

THE BLACKBIRD

Cricket, I say, you scandalous slug-a-bed! [*He hops out of the way.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Beside himself.*] Are you conscious of no impulse to exclaim, cry out, when I have made a dawn so fine and fiery-red that the heron, flying in the early glow, looks from afar like a flamingo?

THE BLACKBIRD

Sure, brother, sure! I feel like shouting, "Bully, do it again!" [*He hops out of the way.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Exhausted.*] That soul! I am more spent with chasing it than with a whole day's grasshopper hunting! [*Violently.*] Did you not see the sky?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Simply.*] How could I? The ground is all you can see through that little black hole. [*Pointing at the flower-pot.*]

CHANTECLER

Did you see the mountain-tops tremble and turn crimson?

THE BLACKBIRD

While you were crowing, I had my eye on your feet.

CHANTECLER

[*Sorrowfully.*] Ah!

THE BLACKBIRD

They were performing on the soft sod something choice in the line of fancy dances!

CHANTECLER

[*Giving up.*] I pity you! Back to your darkness, obscure Blackbird!

THE BLACKBIRD

Your obedient servant, illustrious Cock!

CHANTECLER

My course is toward the sun!

THE BLACKBIRD

Take along smoked glasses!

CHANTECLER

Blackbird, do you know the one thing upon earth worthy that one should live wholly for its sake?

THE BLACKBIRD

There I draw the line. I won't enter the debate!

CHANTECLER

That thing is effort, Blackbird — effort, which uplifts and ennobles the lowest! For which reason, you, contemner of every sublime aspiration, I contemn! And that fragile roseate snail, struggling unaided to silver over a whole fagot, I honour!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Snapping up the snail.*] I'll make him look silly!

CHANTECLER

[*With a cry of horror.*] Abominable! To point a joke — put out a little flame! An end. Here we part. You have no more heart than soul. [*Going.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hopping up on the fagot.*] I have mind, however!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning, disdainfully.*] That is open to discussion.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Acidly.*] Oh, very well! I was administering, in my

merry little characteristic way, a grain of antidote against lunacy. But I wash my claws of you. Go ahead, justify the report of your enemies.

CHANTECLER

[*Returning.*] Who? What?

THE BLACKBIRD

Strut about with your bill-board: "I'm the whole show!"

CHANTECLER

You associate with those who hate me?

THE BLACKBIRD

Do you object?

CHANTECLER

No, you pitiful jester! The habit has grown so strong, you can no more be in earnest about friendship now than anything else. [*Going nearer to him.*] Who are my enemies?

THE BLACKBIRD

The Owls.

CHANTECLER

You sorry fool! Can't you see that to believe in my destiny becomes all too easy if the Owls are against me?

THE BLACKBIRD

Rest happy, then. They have a deal on — your lighting of the world being a trifle flashy for their taste — a deal on for cutting your throat.

CHANTECLER

Through whom?

THE BLACKBIRD

A brother bird.

CHANTECLER

A Cock?

THE BLACKBIRD

A Saint George of a Cock, who is to meet you ——

CHANTECLER

Where?

THE BLACKBIRD

At the Guinea-hen's.

CHANTECLER

What a farce!

THE BLACKBIRD

Wait! It's one of those Cocks bred and trained for fighting, who would make just two bites of either you or me. [*As* CHANTECLER *abruptly starts toward the back.*] Where are you going?

CHANTECLER

To the Guinea-hen's.

THE BLACKBIRD

Ha! I forgot our knightly spurs and helmet! [*He makes a feint of preventing him.*] Take my advice, don't go!

CHANTECLER

But I will go!

THE BLACKBIRD

Hold on!

CHANTECLER

[*Stopping beside the flower-pot, as if amazed.*] How singular!

THE BLACKBIRD

What?

CHANTECLER

Did I understand you to say you came out of that flower-pot?

THE BLACKBIRD

You did.

CHANTECLER

[*Incredulous.*] But how could you possibly have got into it?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Getting into the pot.*] I told you, and tell you again! Through that little black hole I was looking at the —— [*He thrusts his bill through the hole at the bottom.*]

CHANTECLER

The earth! And now through a little blue hole you shall look at the sky! [*With a vigorous blow of his wing he turns the pot over the* BLACKBIRD, *who is heard fluttering beneath it, with smothered cries.*] For you hate and shun the blue sky, you Dwellers in Pots! But one can force you to see at least as much as would cover a corn-flower, by overturning your pot, now and then — with the sweep of a wing! [*Off.*]

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT THIRD

THE GUINEA-HEN'S DAY

Corner of a kitchen-garden, enclosed on the sides by hedges. At the back, espaliers. Vegetables and flowers of all kinds. Cold frames. Among the fruit trees, an upright pole, rigged in an old frock-coat, pair of trousers, and opera hat, fills the function of scarecrow.

SCENE FIRST

The GUINEA-HEN, HENS, DUCKS, *etc.; the* PHEASANT-HEN, *the* BLACKBIRD, *later* PATOU.

At the rise of the curtain, multitudinous clatter and confused swarming of HENS *and* CHICKENS.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Going impetuously from one to the other.*] How do you do? How do you do? — There is scarcely room to move! My guests reach all the way to the cucumber patch!

CHORUS

[*Up in the air.*]

Busily buzzing——

THE GUINEA-HEN

A regular crush!

A HEN

[*Gazing at a row of huge pumpkins.*] What attractive objects!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Art pottery! Rather good of its kind, if I do say so!

A CHICK

[*Listening with his bill in the air.*] Singers?

THE GUINEA-HEN

Yes, ——

CHORUS

Busily buzzing——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*In her sprightliest manner.*] The Wasps! [*To a* CHICKEN.] How do you do? [*She flits from one guest to the other.*]

THE WASPS

Busily buzzing
Estival glees.
Fill we with murmurs
The mulberry trees!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Passing with the* BLACKBIRD *and laughing.*] So you were caught?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Finishing his story.*] Exactly as if a hat had been plumped down over me. But I managed by beating my wings to throw off the beastly pot. [*Looking around him.*] Chantecler has not come yet?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Surprised.*] Is he coming?

PATOU

[*Suddenly appearing on the wheelbarrow, from whence he can watch the scene as from a pulpit.*] I still hope he may change his mind.

THE BLACKBIRD

Patou there, in the wheelbarrow?

PATOU

[*Shaking his surly head, and a bit of broken chain hanging from his collar.*] Chantecler told me everything, Blackbird, as he went by. In a towering rage I broke my chain, and am here to keep an eye on the wicked lot of you.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* BLACKBIRD.] Has he invited himself to my party, that moth-eaten old thing?

CHORUS

[*Among the trees.*]

Our praises, Sun, our praises!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking upward.*] Music?

THE GUINEA-HEN

The Cicadas!

CHORUS OF CICADAS

We simmer in thy gaze,
We bask beneath thy blaze,
Receive our grateful praise!

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

[*Low and quickly to his mother.*] Tsicadas, mother. You must pronounce it Tsi!

A MAGPIE

[*In black coat and white tie, announcing the guests as they arrive through a hole such as Chickens dig at the foot of hedges.*] The Gander!

THE GANDER

[*Entering, jocularly.*] What's all this fuss and feathers, my lady? Our names called as we enter?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Demurely.*] Yes, you see, expecting some rather great people, I thought it well to stand an usher at the blackthorn door.

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] The Duck!

THE DUCK

[*Entering, impressed by the elegance of the occasion.*] Here is style and grandeur indeed! Our names called!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Yes, you see, expecting some rather great people ——

THE MAGPIE

The Turkey-hen!

THE TURKEY-HEN

[*Entering, after a supercilious glance.*] This is quite more of an affair, my dear, than I was anticipating.— Names called!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Yes, I had in the Magpie to supplement my usual staff.

CHORUS

[*Among blossoming branches.*]

Boom! Boom!
From bloom to bloom!

THE TURKEY-HEN

[*Lifting her bill.*] A Chorus?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Breezily.*] The Bees!

CHORUS

Make distant flowers
Bride and groom!

THE TURKEY-HEN

Wonders on every side!

THE GUINEA-HEN

The Bees here, the Tsicadas yonder —— [*To a passing* HEN.] How do you do? How do you do?

BEES

[*At the right.*]

Boom!

CICADAS

[*At the left.*]

Our praises!

BEES

Boom!

CICADAS

Our praises!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] My garden produces the most remarkable of everything!

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

The brightest flowers!

THE GUINEA-HEN

The big potatoes!

THE BLACKBIRD

And peaches! Perfect peaches!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Inconvenienced by the movement and the crowd, to the* BLACKBIRD.] Let us stand out of the crowd a moment, behind this watering-pot.

THE BLACKBIRD

The watering-pot, alias the Intermittent Baldpate, so called because there flows from his copper scalp when he is tilted a marvelous growth of silver hair.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Spying the* CAT, *who, outstretched along an apple-bough, is watching with half-closed eyes.*] I have among my guests the Cat.

THE BLACKBIRD

Tomkyns de Tomkyns!

[*A* BIRD *is heard warbling in a tree.*]

THE GUINEA-HEN

I have the Chaffinch!

THE BLACKBIRD

Let him chaff inchworms, what care we?

THE GUINEA-HEN

The Darning-needle!

THE BLACKBIRD

She shall mend up Ragged Robin, now's his chance!

PATOU

[*More and more disgusted.*] All that is supposed to be funny!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Pecking a cabbage leaf from which roll drops of dew.*] I have the Dew!

PATOU

[*Grimly.*] Your witticism for her?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Brightly.*] Fresh-water pearls!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Pointing out several* CHICKS *walking among the crowd.*] Have you seen them? I have several of the A. I.'s Chicks!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

A. I.?

THE GUINEA-HEN

The Acme Incubator.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh, have you?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Presenting the* CHICKS.] All from the topmost compartment!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Indeed?

ONE OF THE CHICKS

[*Nudging his neighbour.*] She is dumbfounded!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Contemptuously.*] Eggs hatched by the old vulgar method, fie!

THE BLACKBIRD

Good Lord, exempt us!

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] The Guinea-pig!

THE GUINEA-HEN

It's the famous one, you know! The Guinea-pig who was inoculated — surely you remember the case — very well, that's the one! There you see him. I made a point of getting him to come. Everybody is here! I have everybody! I have —— [*To the* GUINEA-PIG.] How do you do? [*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] I have our great philosopher Tur-Key — Yes, it should be written with a hyphen — who will give us a little talk among the currant bushes under the tea-roses — [*To a passing* HEN.] How do you do? [*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Educational Tea or Currant Topics! [*Whirling from one to the other.*] Everyone is here, everyone of the slightest mark or consequence! The Pheasant-hen is here, in a frock from fairyland. The Duck is here,

who is so good as to say he will recite for us by and by. The Tortoise is here —— [*Noticing that the* TORTOISE *is not there.*] I was mistaken, the Tortoise is not here. She is late.

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Affecting deep concern.*] What is the little talk she seems so regrettably likely to miss?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Suddenly serious.*] The Moral Problem.

THE BLACKBIRD

What a pity!

[*The* GUINEA-HEN *goes to the back, scattering greetings, in ecstasies of sociability.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To the* BLACKBIRD.] Who is the Tortoise?

THE BLACKBIRD

A hard old character, impervious, I fear, to moral problems, who goes in for walking matches in a loud check suit!

[*Murmur among the hollyhocks.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Listen, a Drone!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Briskly returning.*] The Drone is here! In the bright light overhead, what a stylish figure of a fly!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Presenting the* CHICKS.] All from the topmost compartment!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Indeed?

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THE BLACKBIRD

No "at home" complete without it! Ladies cry for it! Won't be happy until ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Jumping up in the air toward the* DRONE.] How do you do? How do you do? [*She follows his flight with excited leaps and hops.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Touching his brow with his wing.*] She is dotty!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*At the back, with shrill* GUINEA-HEN *cries.*] It's my last day! How do you do? My last day until August! Mondays in August, don't forget!

A HEN

[*Seeing cherries dropping around her.*] Oh, cherries, look!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking upward.*] It is the Breeze!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Fluttering forward again, excited as ever.*] I have the Breeze, who now and then shakes down a cherry! I never ask her. She comes unasked. What's-his-name is here! And What's-her-name is here, and —— [*To the back tumultuously.*]

THE BLACKBIRD

And Thingumbob, and Stick-in-the-mud! [*He has arrived without appearance of design beneath the tree where*

the CAT *is lying, and asks rapidly, under breath.*] Cat, what about the conspiracy?

THE CAT

[*Who from his tree can see beyond the hedge.*] It is afoot. I see the interminable file of phenomenal Cocks approaching, headed by the Peacock who comes to present them.

A CRY

[*Outside.*] Ee—yong!

[*The* CROWD *throngs toward the entrance.*]

PATOU

[*Grumbling.*] That abominable concertina cry ——

THE MAGPIE

The Peacock!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To the* BLACKBIRD.] Have you a fancy name for him?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Imitating the* PEACOCK'S *cry.*] Our great Accordee—yong!

SCENE SECOND

THE SAME, THE PEACOCK.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* PEACOCK, *who enters slowly, with his head borne very stiff and high.*] Master, dear Master, would

you be so extremely condescending as to come and stand with your back to these sunflowers? Peacock! Sunflowers! A study for Burne-Jones!

ALL

[*Crowding around the* PEACOCK.] Master! Master!

A CHICKEN

[*Low to the* DUCK.] A word from him can make one's fortune in society!

ANOTHER CHICKEN

[*Who has succeeded in forcing his way to the* PEACOCK, *stammering with emotion.*] Master, what do you think of my latest "cheep"? [*Suspense. Religious silence.*]

THE PEACOCK

[*Solemnly, letting the word drop slowly from his beak.*] Definitive. [*Sensation.*]

A DUCK

[*Trembling.*] And my "quack"? [*Suspense.*]

THE PEACOCK

Ultimate! [*Sensation.*]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Delighted, to the* HENS.] I may say that it is at my days most especially he throws off these specimens of a verbal art which might fairly be called ——

THE PEACOCK

Lapidary.

ALL THE HENS

[*Rolling up their eyes.*] Wonderful!

A HEN

[*Coming forward, faint with emotion.*] Master, high priest of taste, what do you think of my dress? [*Suspense.*]

THE PEACOCK

[*After a glance.*] Affirmative. [*Sensation.*]

THE TUFTED HEN

[*Same business.*] And my bonnet? [*Suspense.*]

THE PEACOCK

Absolute. [*Sensation.*]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*In a burst of emotion.*] Our bonnets are absolute!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Affecting exclusive interest in the* BEES.] Ah, there is the Choir Invisible striking up again!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Presenting the young* GUINEA-COCK *to the* PEACOCK.] My son! — What do you think of him?

THE PEACOCK

Plausible.

CHORUS OF WASPS

Busily buzzing ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Overjoyed, running to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Oh, he said he was plausible!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Who was?

THE GUINEA-HEN

My son!

CHORUS OF BEES

When July
Too hotly glows
Seek the shade
Inside the rose!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Returning to the* PEACOCK.] Does not the rhythm of that chorus impress you as ——

THE PEACOCK

Asunartêtos!

A HEN

[*To the* GUINEA-HEN.] Your guest, my dear, can fit an epithet!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Pontiff of the Unexpected Adjective I call him!

THE PEACOCK

[*Distilling his words, in a discordant haughty voice.*] True it is that ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Ah, this is most pleasant, most pleasant! He is going to talk to us.

THE PEACOCK

—— a Ruskin rather more refined, I hope, than the earlier one, with a tact ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Very true!

PEACOCK

—— a tact for which I stand largely in my own debt, I have constituted myself Petronius-Priest and Mæcenas-Messiah, volatile volatiliser of words, and that, jeweled judge, I love by my cameos and filigrees of speech to represent the Taste of which I am the ——

PATOU

Oh, my poor head!

THE PEACOCK

[*Nonchalantly.*] —— shall I say guardian?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Effervescently.*] Do say guardian!

THE PEACOCK

No. Thesmothetes. [*Respectful murmur of delight.*]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Now you have seen our Peacock! Aren't you excited?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Slightly bored.*] Yes, — because I know the Cock is coming.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Delighted.*] To-day? He is coming to-day? [*She announces to the general company, enthusiastically.*] Chantecler!

THE PEACOCK

[*Slightly miffed.*] A far greater triumph lies in store for you, fair friend.

THE GUINEA-HEN

Triumph? [*The* PEACOCK *nods mysteriously.*] What triumph?

THE PEACOCK

[*Walking away from her.*] You shall see.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Following him.*] Of what triumph are you speaking?

THE PEACOCK

I said, "You shall see!"

MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] Cock Braekel or Campine!

SCENE THIRD

THE SAME, *then gradually the* COCKS.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Stopping short, amazed.*] Braekel? At my party? There's some mistake.

THE BRAEKEL COCK

[*Bowing before her.*] Madam ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Breathless with emotion in the presence of this white* COCK *braided with black.*] This unexpected pleasure ——

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] Cock Ramelslohe ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Heavens!

THE MAGPIE

[*Finishing.*] —— of the Slate-blue Claw!

THE PEACOCK

[*In the* GUINEA-HEN'S *ear, while the startling* RAMELSLOHE *bows.*] He is one of the most recent leucotites!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Blankly.*] A leucotite — How interesting!

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing in a louder and louder, more and more impressive voice.*] Cock Wyandotte of the Sable Spur! [*Shiver of emotion among the* HENS.]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Off her head with excitement.*] Heavens and gracious powers — my son!

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

[*Running to her.*] Mamma!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Wyandotte! Cock Wyandotte!

THE PEACOCK

[*With a fine carelessness.*] Cock with strawberry coronet, product of Art Nouveau!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the newcomers who are surrounded by astonished murmurs.*] Strawberry coronet! — Gentlemen ——

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

[*Who has gone to take a look outside.*] Mamma!

THE GUINEA-HEN

—— so kindly condescending to honour my poor house ——

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

Mamma, there are still others coming!

THE MAGPIE

His lordship, the Cock ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Heavens, what Cock?

THE MAGPIE

Cock of Mesopotamia with the Double Comb!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Double! Oh! [*Dashing to welcome the newcomer.*] Charmed, charmed indeed!

THE PEACOCK

Out upon the obsolete! I wished to show you a few young gentlemen slightly superlative and veritably precious.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Returning to the* PEACOCK.] How shall I thank you, Peacock, dear friend? [*To the* PHEASANT-HEN, *patronisingly.*] You will excuse me, I know, you charming little thing. You must understand, my dear, that his lordship the Cock of Mesopotamia has just arrived! [*Running to the* COCK, *who bows his two combs.*] A proud day for us! Charmed, delighted, enchanted!

MAGPIE

Cock d'Orpington of the Feather-ringed Eye!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Feather-ringed — Oh!

THE BLACKBIRD

The plot thickens!

THE MAGPIE

[*While the* GUINEA-HEN *is flying toward the* ORPINGTON COCK.] Bearded Cock of Varna!

THE PEACOCK

[*To the* GUINEA-HEN.] A typical Slav!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Leaving the* ORPINGTON *for the* BEARDED COCK.] Oh, the Slav soul we have heard so much about! Charmed, beyond words, charmed!

THE MAGPIE

Rose-footed Scotch Grey Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Leaving the* BEARDED COCK *for the* SCOTCH GREY.] Oh, that rose foot! I do admire that rose foot! Think of introducing that rose foot at my tea! [*With conviction.*] What a social event!

THE MAGPIE

Cock ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Out of her senses.*] No, I say, no! There can't be any more!

THE MAGPIE

Cock with Goblet-shaped comb!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Who at every name rushes excitedly toward the newcomer.*] Charmed, I am sure! Oh, what a novel notion! Goblet-shaped!

THE MAGPIE

Blue Cock of Andalusia!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Your egg, I presume, was laid in the vibrating hollow of a guitar! Delighted and honored, — both!

THE MAGPIE

Cock Langsham!

THE PEACOCK

A Tartar!

ALL THE HENS

[*Smitten with amazement at sight of the black giant.*] A Tartar!

THE MAGPIE

Gold-penciled Hamburg Cock!

ALL THE HENS

[*At sight of the gold-laced* COCK *in the cocked hat.*] Gold-penciled Hamburg!

THE GUINEA-HEN

My kitchen-garden party will be famous! [*To the* HAMBURG COCK, *whose breast is striped with black and yellow.*] Oh, what a wonderful waistcoat! May I ask what it is made of?

THE BLACKBIRD

Of zebra!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Zebra, you don't say so! It will be the pride of my life, of my whole ——

THE MAGPIE

Cock ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Jumping.*] No, I can't believe it!

THE MAGPIE

—— of Burma!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Burma! [*Increasing general agitation.*]

THE PEACOCK

An East Indian.

THE GUINEA-HEN

Oh, I can see his Hindu soul right in his eyes, the Hindu soul we hear so much about! [*Running to the*

newcomer, in an adoring voice.] Charmed, charmed! The Hindu soul — oh!

THE MAGPIE

Padua Cocks — The Dutch Padua of Poland!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Dutch of Poland! This is really more than I ever aspired to!

[*The* PADUA COCKS *enter, shaking their plumes.*]

THE MAGPIE

The Gold Cock! The Silver Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*In ecstasies of admiration before the flowing plume of the latter.*] With a waterfall on his head!

THE BLACKBIRD

And a suspension bridge!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*No longer conscious of what she is saying.*] And a suspension bridge!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* PATOU.] Poor Guinea-hen, she will say anything after anybody!

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing in a louder and louder tone ever more extraordinary* COCKS.] Bagdad Cock!

THE PEACOCK

[*Dominating the tumult.*] Consummately Arabian Nights.

THE GUINEA-HEN

Did you hear? Consummately Arabian Nights!

ALL THE HENS

To be sure! Awfully Arabian Nights!

THE PEACOCK

Kamaralzaman himself is hardly more so.

THE MAGPIE

Bantam Cock with ruffles!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Transported.*] How eighteenth century this is! Look, oh, look! A dwarf! A dwarf! Dwarfs! Little cunning bits of dwarfs!

THE YOUNG GUINEA-COCK

[*Low.*] Mamma, do control yourself!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Screaming in the midst of the* COCKS.] No, no, I can't and won't! That is Kamaralzaman! I don't really know which I prefer, which I ——

THE MAGPIE

Guelder Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Rushing to the newcomer.*] This is truly a treat! Another Belgian!

THE MAGPIE

Serpent-necked Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Rattled.*] To you, dear Seacock, I owe this Perpent-neck!

THE MAGPIE

Duck-sided Cock! Crow-billed Cock! Hawk-footed Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Who has fallen upon the new arrivals, bursts into shrill volubility before the last of them.*] This surpasses all! An albino! Charmed, my dear sir, honoured, enchanted! Oh, on his head he wears a cheese!

A HEN

So he does, a cheese! — A cream cheese, to be sure!

ALL THE HENS

A cream cheese!

THE MAGPIE

Crève Cœur Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Rushing to meet him.*] Oh, he has horns on his head!

THE PEACOCK

Satanic.

THE MAGPIE

Ptarmigan Cock!

THE PEACOCK

Aesthetic.

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Rushing up to him.*] Oh, he wears on his head an Assyrian helmet!

THE MAGPIE

White Pile ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Rushing up to him.*] He wears on his head —— [*Stopping short at sight of his docked comb.*] Nothing whatever. He wears nothing whatever on his head. How odd it looks!

THE CAT

[*From his apple tree, to the* BLACKBIRD, *indicating the* WHITE PILE GAME-COCK.] There is the champion. The dust conceals a razor on his lean foot. [*The* GAME-COCK *disappears among the throng of fancy* COCKS, *who are surrounded by a swarm of cackling* HENS.]

THE MAGPIE

Negro Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Gone quite mad among the multitude of* COCKS *now filling the kitchen-garden with their extraordinary head-gear, aigrettes, and plumes and helmets, double and triple combs.*] Charmed, honoured, enchanted — enchanted, honoured, charmed!

PATOU

She has taken leave of her wits!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the empty air.*] Charmed, charmed, enchanted, en ——

THE MAGPIE

Cock with Supernumerary Toe! — Naked-necked Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Naked?

THE MAGPIE

Necked!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To a* HEN.] My dear, now we shall see something worth while!

THE MAGPIE

Japanese Cocks — Cock Splendens!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*At sight of this* COCK *whose tail is eight yards long.*] Oh! — In a swallow-tail!

THE MAGPIE

Clump-backed ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Perceiving that this* COCK *is absolutely flat at the back.*] In a monkey-jacket!

THE MAGPIE

[*Finishing.*] —— or Tailless Cock!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Beside herself.*] He has nothing whatever behind! This is the crowning moment of my career! [*To the newcomer, effusively.*] Charmed! No tail! This is ——

THE BLACKBIRD

I like his cheek!

THE MAGPIE

[*While more and more heterogeneous* COCKS *appear.*]

Cock Walikikili, called Choki-kukullo! Pseudo-Chinese Cuculicolor!

THE GUINEA-HEN

What a choice gathering!

THE PEACOCK

Kaleidoscopically cosmopolitan.

THE MAGPIE

Blue Java! White Java!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Losing all shame.*] Won't Java cup o' coffee?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Falling upon the* JAVA COCKS.] Charmed, charmed!

THE MAGPIE

Brahma Cock! Cochin Cock!

THE PEACOCK

[*Proudly.*] The great vicious Cocks, representatives of the corrupt East, the putrescent Orient!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Intoxicated.*] Putrescent!

THE PEACOCK

Unwholesome, morbid grace!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* COCHIN COCK.] Charmed! Charmed! — Do notice his obscene eye!

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing wildly, infected with the general delirium.*] Chili Cock, curled hindside fore! Antwerp Cock, curled inside out!

ALL THE HENS

[*Fighting for the newcomers.*] Oh, putrescent! — Oh, hindside fore!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Inside out!

THE MAGPIE

Shankless Jumping-cock!

A HEN

[*Fainting with emotion.*] I suppose he jumps with his stomach!

THE GUINEA-HEN

An India-rubber Cock!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* PATOU, *who from his wheelbarrow is looking off into the distance.*] And Chantecler?

PATOU

Will be here soon.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Can you see him?

PATOU

Yes, off there, scratching up the earth. Now he is on his way.

THE MAGPIE

Ghoondook Cock with Umbrella Topknot!

CRY OF ENTHUSIASM

Oh!

THE MAGPIE

Iberian Cock with Lint Side Whiskers!

CRY OF ENTHUSIASM

Oh!

THE MAGPIE

Cock Bans Backin or Fat Cheek of Thuringia!

CRY OF ENTHUSIASM

Oh!

THE MAGPIE

Yankee Cochin of Plymouth Rock!

[*Sudden silence.* CHANTECLER *has appeared at the entrance, just behind the* COCK *last announced.*]

CHANTECLER

[*To the* MAGPIE.] Pray simply say, "The Cock!"

SCENE FOURTH

THE SAME, CHANTECLER, *later* THE PIGEONS, *and* THE SWAN.

THE MAGPIE

[*After looking* CHANTECLER *up and down, disdainfully.*] The Cock!

CHANTECLER

[*From the threshold, to the* GUINEA-HEN.] Your pardon, Madam, — my humble duty! — for venturing to present myself in this plumage ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Come in, I pray!

CHANTECLER

I hardly know whether I should. I have a limited number of toes ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Indulgently.*] Oh, never mind!

CHANTECLER

I cannot claim to be a Carpathian, and — I hardly know how to conceal it from you — I have feet!

THE GUINEA-HEN

Oh, let not that distress you!

CHANTECLER

A plain red-pepper comb, an ordinary garlic clove ear ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Of course, of course, we will excuse you. You came in your business suit!

CHANTECLER

Nay, my best! Pardon if my best combines merely the green of all April with the gold of all October! I stand abashed. I am the Cock, just the Cock, without further addition. The Cock such as he is still found in some old-fashioned barnyard. A Cock shaped like a Cock, whose outline persists in the vane on the steeple-top, in the artist's eye, and the humble toy which a child's hand finds among shavings in a little wooden box.

AN IRONICAL VOICE

[*From among the group of gorgeous prodigies.*] The Gallic Cock, in short?

CHANTECLER

[*Gently, without even turning.*] Sure as I am of my aboriginal claim to this soil, I make no point of assuming the name. But, now you mention it, I recognise that when one simply says the Cock, that is the Cock he means!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Low to* CHANTECLER.] I have seen your adversary!

CHANTECLER

[*Catching sight of the* PHEASANT-HEN *approaching.*] Be still! She must know nothing of this!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Coquettishly.*] Did you come for the sake of seeing me?

CHANTECLER

[*Bowing.*] I am weak, you remember!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Listening to the* COCHIN-CHINA COCK, *who is talking in an undertone, thickly surrounded by* HENS.] That Cock from Cochin China is simply awful!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning.*] Enough!

THE HENS

[*Around the* COCHIN COCK, *giving little scandalised cries.*] Oh! ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Tickled.*] Oh, you naughty bird! — He is quite the most improper of our gallinacea!

CHANTECLER

[*Louder.*] Enough!

THE COCHIN-CHINA COCK

[*Stops, and with mocking surprise.*] Is it the Gallic Cock objecting?

CHANTECLER

I am not Gallic if you give the word a base or ridiculous meaning. By Jove! Every Hen here knows whether my trumpet blast belongs to a soprano! But your perverse attempts to wring blushes from little baggages in convenient corners outrage my love of Love! It is true that I care more to retain love's dream than these Cochin-Chinese, who, courting a giggle, use refinement in coarseness, research in vulgarity; true that my blood has swifter flow in a less ponderous body, and that I am not a feathered pig, — but a Cock!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Come, come away to the woods, — I love you!

CHANTECLER

[*Looking around him.*] Oh, to see a real being appear! Someone simple, someone ——

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] Two Pigeons!

CHANTECLER

[*Drawing a breath of relief.*] At last, — pigeons! [*He runs eagerly to the entrance.*]

THE PIGEONS

[*Entering with a series of somersaults.*] Hop!

CHANTECLER

[*Falling back in amazement.*] What is this?

THE PIGEONS

[*Introducing themselves between two springs.*] The Tumblers! English Clowns!

CHANTECLER

Where am I?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Running after the* TUMBLERS *who disappear among the throng of guests.*] Hop! Hop!

CHANTECLER

Pigeons turning acrobats! — Oh, the joy of seeing something true, something unblemished ——

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] The Swan!

CHANTECLER

[*Coming forward delighted.*] Good! A Swan! [*Shrinking away.*] He is black!

THE BLACK SWAN

[*With swaggering satisfaction.*] I have discarded the whiteness while preserving the outline!

CHANTECLER

The real Swan's shadow does no less! [*Thrusting the* SWAN *aside to hop up on a bench whence, through a gap in the hedge, he can see the distant meadows.*] Let me climb up on this bench. I need to make sure that Nature still exists — though so far away! Ah, yes! The grass is green, a cow is grazing, a calf sucking — And, Heaven be praised, the calf has a single head! [*Coming down again beside the* PHEASANT-HEN.]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh, come away to the innocent woods, sincere and dewy, where we will love each other!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Pointing at* CHANTECLER *and the* PHEASANT-HEN, *who are standing close and talking low.*] We are getting on!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Intensely interested.*] Do you think so? [*She spreads her wings to screen them.*] Oh, I am so fond of helping along a clandestine love affair!

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Sticking his bill under the* GUINEA-HEN'S *wing so as to keep the pair in sight.*] I believe she has thoughts of annexing his comb.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER.] Come, dearest, come away!

CHANTECLER

[*Resisting.*] No, I must sing where Destiny placed me. I am useful here, I am beloved ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Remembering what she overheard the night before in the farmyard.*] Are you so sure? — Come away to the woods, where we shall hear real pigeons cooing tenderly to each other!

THE TURKEY

[*At the back.*] Ladies, the great Peacock ——

THE PEACOCK

[*Modestly.*] The Super-peacock — who supervenes, and supersedes ——

THE GUINEA-HEN

Will spread his tail for us! He has expressed his amiable willingness so far to favour us.

[*The company falls into groups of spectators, the outlandish* COCKS *forming a wreath around their patron.*]

THE PEACOCK

[*Preparing to spread his tail.*] I am, by precious natural gift, in addition to my multifarious accomplishments, something of a — shall I say artist in firework?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Effervescently.*] Yes!

THE PEACOCK

No. Pyrotechnist. For the choicest piece in urban gardens, where Catharine-wheels on festival nights spurt sidereal spray, and rockets shot into gold-riddled skies fall back in prismatic showers, is less sapphirine, smaragdine, cuprine ——

CHANTECLER

Zounds!

THE PEACOCK

—— than, I venture to say, ladies, am I ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh, I understood that last word!

THE PEACOCK

—— when I unfurl the union of fan, jewel-case, and screen, upon which I offer to the self-same sunbeams that redden the reed all the joyous gems you now may contemplate!

CHANTECLER

What a silly bill!

[*The* PEACOCK *has spread his tail.*]

A COCK

[*To the* PEACOCK.] Master, which of us will you make the fashion?

THE PADUA COCK

[*Quickly coming forward.*] Me! I look like a palm-tree!

A CHINA COCK

[*Pushing the* PADUA COCK *aside.*] I look like a pagoda!

A BIG FEATHER-FOOTED COCK

[*Pushing the* CHINA COCK *aside.*] Me! I have cauliflowers sprouting at my heels!

CHANTECLER

Each is in one the show and Mr. Barnum!

[*Parading and filing past the* PEACOCK.] ALL See my beak! See my feet! See my feathers!

CHANTECLER

[*Suddenly shouting at them.*] Lo! While you hold your costume contest, a Scarecrow gives you his blessing!

[*Behind them, in fact, the wind has lifted the arms of the* SCARECROW, *which loosely wave above the pageant.*]

ALL

[*Starting back.*] What?

CHANTECLER

Behold this dummy talking to that lay-figure! [*While the wind blows through the flapping rags.*] What say the trousers, dancing their limp fandango? They say, "We were once the fashion!" And, terror of the titlark, what says the old hat which a beggar would none of? "I was the fashion!" And the coat? "I was the fashion!" And the tattered sleeves, that no one has care to mend, try to clasp the Wind, whom they take for the Fashion, and drop back empty — The Wind has passed, the Wind is far!

THE PEACOCK

[*To the animals slightly dismayed by this address.*] You poor-spirited creatures, that thing cannot talk!

CHANTECLER

Man says the same of us.

THE PEACOCK

[*To the birds nearest to him.*] He is vexed because of those Cocks whom I introduced. [*To* CHANTECLER, *ironically.*] What, my dear sir, do you say to these resplendent gentlemen?

CHANTECLER

I say, my dear sir, that these resplendent gentlemen are manufactured wares, the work of merchants with highly complex brains, who to fashion a ridiculous Chicken have taken a wing from that one, a topknot from this. I say that in such Cocks nothing remains of the true Cock. They are Cocks of shreds and patches, idle bric-à-brac, fit to figure in a catalogue, not in a barnyard with its decent dunghill and its dog. I say that those befrizzled, beruffled, bedeviled Cocks were never stroked and cherished by Nature's maternal hand. I say that it's all Aviculture, and Aviculture is flapdoodle! And I say that those preposterous parrots, without style, without beauty, without form, whose bodies have not even kept the pleasing oval of the egg they were hatched from, look like so many desperate fowls escaped from some hen-coop of the Apocalypse!

A COCK

My dear sir ——

CHANTECLER

[*With rising spirit.*] And I add that the whole duty of a Cock is to be an embodied crimson cry! And when a Cock is not that, it matters little that his comb be shaped like a toadstool, or his quills twisted like a screw, he will soon vanish and be heard of no more, having been nothing but a variety of a variety!

A COCK

I protest ——

CHANTECLER

[*Going from one to the other.*] Yes, Cocks affecting incongruous forms, Cocks crowned with cocoa-palm coiffures —— Hear me talk like the Peacock! I lapse into alliteration! [*Finding his fun in bewildering them with cackling guttural volubility.*] Yes, Cockerels cockaded with cockles, Cockatrice-headed Cockasters, cock-eyed Cockatoos! Not content to be common Cocks, your crotchet it was to be what but crack Cocks? Yes, Fashion, to be accounted of thy flock, these chuckle-headed Cocks craved to be Super-cocks. But know ye not, ye crazy Cocks, one cannot be so queer a Cock, but there may occur a queerer Cock? Let some Cock come whose coccyx boasts a more flamboyant shock, and you pass like childish measles, croup or chicken-pox! Consider that to-morrow, high Cockalorums, fancy Cocks, consider that day after to-morrow, cheese-capped, goblet-crested Cocks, in spite of curly hackle and cauliflowered hocks, a more fantastic Cock than ever may creep out of a — box! For the Cock-fancier, to diversify his stock, may more fantastically still com-

bine his Cutcutdaycuts and his Cocks, and you will be no more — sad Cuckoos made a mock! — but old rococo Cocks beside this more coquettish Cock!

A Cock

And how, may one learn from you, can a Cock secure himself against becoming rococo?

Chantecler

One royal way there is: to think only of crowing like a right and proper Cock!

A Cock

[*Haughtily.*] We are well known, I beg to state, for our exceptionally fine crowing!

Chantecler

Known to whom?

SCENE FIFTH

The Same, *three* Chickens, *noticeable among the rest for a certain jaunty pertness of gait and demeanour, who for a minute or so have been moving among the artificial* Cocks.

First Chicken

To us, of course!

Second Chicken

To us!

Third Chicken

To us!

ALL THREE

[*Bowing at once.*] Good morning!

FIRST CHICKEN

Your voice?

SECOND CHICKEN

Tenor?

THIRD CHICKEN

Bass?

SECOND CHICKEN

Robusto?

THIRD CHICKEN

Di cortesia?

CHANTECLER

[*Bewildered, looking toward the* PHEASANT-HEN.] What is this? An interlude?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

An interview.

SECOND CHICKEN

Do you take it in your chest?

THIRD CHICKEN

Or in your head?

CHANTECLER

Do I take what?

FIRST CHICKEN

Pray talk without reserve. We represent the Board of Investigation into the Gallodoodle Movement.

CHANTECLER

That's all very well, but I —— [*Attempting to pass.*]

FIRST CHICKEN

You will find it difficult, I think, to leave, until you have answered such questions as we are pleased to ask. Is your early meal a light one?

CHANTECLER

But ——

SECOND CHICKEN

You have tendencies, no doubt ——

CHANTECLER

Hosts.

SECOND CHICKEN

What do you feel most particularly drawn to?

CHANTECLER

Hens.

FIRST CHICKEN

[*Without smiling.*] Have you nothing to communicate with regard to your song?

CHANTECLER

I just sing.

SECOND CHICKEN

And when you sing ——?

CHANTECLER

The heavens hear me.

THIRD CHICKEN

Have you a special method?

CHANTECLER

I ——

FIRST CHICKEN

You live ——

CHANTECLER

To sing!

SECOND CHICKEN

And your song ——?

CHANTECLER

Is my life!

THIRD CHICKEN

But how do you sing?

CHANTECLER

I take pains.

FIRST CHICKEN

But do you scan [*Beating furiously with his wing.*] one-one-two? One-three? Three-one? Or four? What is your dynamic theory?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Shouting.*] Who has not his little pet dynamic theory?

CHANTECLER

Dyna ——?

SECOND CHICKEN

Where do you place the accent? On the Cock ——?

THIRD CHICKEN

On the Doo?

CHANTECLER

On the ——

FIRST CHICKEN

[*Impatiently.*] What is your school?

CHANTECLER

Schools of Cocks?

SECOND CHICKEN

[*Rapidly.*] Certainly. Some sing Cock-a-doodle-doo, and some Keek-a-deedle-dee!

CHANTECLER

Cock ——? Keek ——?

THIRD CHICKEN

Not to speak of those who ——

A COCK

[*Coming forward.*] The correct and proper way to crow is Cowkerdowdledow!

CHANTECLER

What Cock is that?

FIRST CHICKEN

An Anglo-Indian.

SECOND CHICKEN

And the Turk over there, whose comb suggests a cyst, crows Coocooroocoocoo!

THIRD CHICKEN

[*Shouting in his ear.*] Do you not upon occasions vary your Cockadoodledoo with Cackadaddledaa?

ANOTHER COCK

[*Springing up at the right.*] I, for one, entirely suppress the vowels: C-ck-d-dl-d!

CHANTECLER

[*Trying to get away.*] Is it a Welsh Rabbit dream?

ANOTHER COCK

[*Springing up at the left.*] O-a-oo-e-oo! Have you ever tried suppressing the consonants?

ANOTHER COCK

[*Pushing aside all the others.*] I mix the whole thing up — Cuck-o-deedle-daa! — in a free and supple song!

CHANTECLER

My brain reels!

ALL THE COCKS

[*Gathered about him, fighting.*] No! Cuckodee — No, Cackadaa — No, Coocooroo ——

THE COCK

[*Who mixes all up.*] The free Cockadoodle! The free crow is obligatory!

CHANTECLER

Pray, who is that, speaking with such authority?

FIRST CHICKEN

It is a wonderful Cock who has never sung at all.

CHANTECLER

[*In humble despair.*] And I am only a Cock who sings!

EVERYBODY

[*Drawing away from him in disgust.*] I wouldn't mention it if I were you!

CHANTECLER

I give my song as the rose-tree gives its Rose!

THE PEACOCK

[*Sarcastically.*] Ah, I was waiting for the Rose! [*Pitying laughter.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Low, nervously, to the* BLACKBIRD.] Is my prospective slayer going to keep me waiting much longer?

EVERYONE

[*Disgusted.*] The Rose? Oh!

THE GUINEA-HEN

If you must mention flowers, let them be rather less ——

THE PEACOCK

Elementary. [*With the most disdainful impertinence.*] So you are still at the declension of *Rosa?*

CHANTECLER

I am, you — Peacock! You, I suppose, may be forgiven for speaking slightingly of the Rose, being a rival candidate for the beauty prize. [*Looking around him.*] But I summon these Cocks, from Dorking to Bantam, to defend with me ——

A COCK

[*Nonchalantly.*] Pray whom?

CHANTECLER

The Rose, *Rosam;* to declare on the spot and forthwith ——

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Ironically.*] You set yourself up as the champion——

CHANTECLER

Rosarum, of roses, I do! — To declare that worship is due ——

A COCK

To whom, pray?

CHANTECLER

To roses, *rosis!* — in whose hearts sleep rain-drops like essences in fragrant vials, to declare that they are, and ever will be ——

A VOICE

[*Cold and cutting.*] Painted jades, things of naught! [*All the fancy* COCKS *draw aside, revealing the* WHITE PILE GAME COCK, *who appears, tall and lean and sinister, at the further end of their double row.*]

CHANTECLER

At last!

THE BLACKBIRD

It's time to climb up on the chairs!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* WHITE PILE.] Sir ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are never going to challenge that giant?

CHANTECLER

I am! To appear tall it is sufficient to talk on stilts! [*To the* GAME COCK, *slowly crossing the stage toward him.*] Know that such a remark is not to be endured, and permit me to tell you —— [*Finding a* CHICK *between himself and the* GAME COCK, *he gently puts him aside, saying*] Run to your mother, tot! [*To the* WHITE PILE, *looking insolently at his docked comb.*] —— that you look like a Fool who has mislaid his coxcomb!

THE WHITE PILE

[*Astonished.*] Fool? Coxcomb? What? What? What?

CHANTECLER

[*Beak to beak with the* GAME COCK.] What? What? What? [*A pause. They arch themselves, with bristling neck-hackle.*]

THE WHITE PILE

[*Emphatically.*] In America, during my grand tour, I killed three Claybornes in a day. I have killed two Sherwoods, three Smoks, and one Sumatra. I have killed — let me advise anyone fighting me to take something beforehand to keep down his pulse! — three Redgame at Cambridge and ten Braekels at Bruges!

CHANTECLER

[*Very simply.*] I, my dear sir, have never killed anything. But as I have at different times succored, defended, protected, this one and that, I might perhaps be called, in my own fashion, brave. You need not take these mighty airs with me. I came here know-

ing that you would come. That rose was dangled to afford you the opportunity for brutal stupidity. You did not fail to nibble at its petals. Your name?

THE GAME COCK

White Pile. And yours?

CHANTECLER

Chantecler.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Running desperately to the* DOG.] Patou!

CHANTECLER

[*To* PATOU, *who is growling between his teeth.*] You, keep out of this!

PATOU

So I will, but it's rrrrrrrough!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER.] A Cock does not risk his life for a Rose!

CHANTECLER

A slur upon a flower is a slur upon the Sun!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Running to the* BLACKBIRD.] Do something! This must be patched up — You know you had promised me!

THE BLACKBIRD

Everything can be patched up, my dear, except the quarrels of a fellow's friends!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Giving loud cries of despair.*] Horrible! Oh, horrible! A five-o'clock tea at which guests kill each other! How dreadful —— [*To her son.*] that the Tortoise should not have got here yet!

A VOICE

[*Crying.*] Chantecler, ten against one!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Seating her company, assisting the* HENS *to climb upon flower-pots, cold-frames, pumpkins.*] Quick! quick!

THE BLACKBIRD

Our charming hostess is in great feather, doing the honours of an affair of honour.

PATOU

[*To* CHANTECLER.] Go in and thrash him. This crowd is longing for the sight of your blood.

CHANTECLER

[*Sadly.*] I was never anything but kind!

PATOU

[*Showing the ring which has formed, the faces lighted with hateful eagerness.*] Look at them! [*All necks are craned, all eyes shine; it is hideous.* CHANTECLER *looks, understands, and bows his head.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*With a cry of rage.*] It's a disgrace! A disgrace to the name of fowl!

CHANTECLER

[*Raising his head again.*] So be it. But they shall at least learn to-day who I was, and my secret ——

PATOU

No, don't tell them, if it's what my old dreamer's heart has apprehended!

CHANTECLER

[*Addressing the multitude, in a loud voice, solemnly, like one confessing his faith.*] Know, all of you, that it is I —— [*Deep silence falls. To the* WHITE PILE, *who has given a sign of impatience.*] Your pardon, excellent duellist, but I have a mind, before getting myself killed, to do something brave ——

THE WHITE PILE

[*Surprised.*] Ah?

CHANTECLER

Yes, — get myself laughed at!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

No, dearest, no! Don't do it!

CHANTECLER

I wish to perish amid salvos of laughter! [*To the crowd.*] Riot, spirit of Mockery! Disciples of the Blackbird, prepare! [*In a still louder voice, hammering home every word.*] It is I, who, by my song, bring back the light of day! [*Amazement, then vast laughter shakes the multitude.*] Is the merriment well under way? On guard!

THE GOLDEN PADUA COCK

[*Nodding his plume.*] Gentlemen, engage!

VOICES

[*Amid storms of laughter.*] Funny! Side-splitting! Was anything ever so droll? I shall die laughing!

THE BLACKBIRD

The old Gallic love of a joke is not dead!

A CHICKEN

He sings light into the sky!

A DUCK

The Sun gets up to hear him!

CHANTECLER

[*Avoiding the blows which the* WHITE PILE *is beginning to aim at him.*] Yes, it is I who give you back the Day!

A CHICK

And a jolly fine day it is!

CHANTECLER

[*While parrying and attacking.*] The crowing of other Cocks, able neither to make nor mar, is no better nor worse than sonorous sneezing! Mine —— [*He is wounded.*]

A VOICE

Biff! In the neck!

CHANTECLER

—— mine makes —— [*He is again wounded.*]

THE TURKEY

Insufferable self-sufficiency!

CHANTECLER

—— the light —— [*Again he is struck.*]

A VOICE

Biff! On the neb!

CHANTECLER

—— the light appear!

A VOICE

Biff! In the eye!

CHANTECLER

[*Blinded with blood.*] Yes, the light!

A VOICE

[*Sneering.*] Better have let sleeping darkness lie!

CHANTECLER

[*Automatically repeating beneath his adversary's blows.*] It is I who make the dawn appear!

PATOU

[*Barking.*] Aye! Aye! Aye!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Sobbing.*] Stand up to him, darling! Oh, hit back! Hit back!

A CHICK

Fellows, a nickname for the dawn!

ALL

Yes! Yes!

[*The* WHITE PILE *hurls himself upon* CHANTECLER.]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh, cruel!

THE BLACKBIRD

Chantecler's Light o' Love!

A VOICE

A nickname for the Cock!

ALL

Yes! Yes!

THE BLACKBIRD

Grand Master of Illuminations!

ANOTHER VOICE

Purveyor of Sunny Beams!

CHANTECLER

[*Defending himself foot to foot.*] Thanks! Another quip, for I can still fight with my feet!

A VOICE

The Alarm-Cock!

CHANTECLER

[*Who seems upheld by their insults.*] Another pun! And I who know no more of fighting than can be learned on a peaceful farm ——

A VOICE

Thresh out his hayseed!

CHANTECLER

Thanks! I —— [*His torn feathers fly around him.*]

CRY OF JOY

See his fur fly!

CHANTECLER

I feel —— Another pleasantry!

A VOICE

Lay on, Macfluff!

CHANTECLER

Thanks! I feel that the more I am mocked, insulted, flouted, and denied - - -,

AN ASS

[*Stretching his neck over the hedge.*] Hee-haw!

CHANTECLER

Thanks! — the better I shall fight!

THE WHITE PILE

[*Chuckling.*] He is game, but he's giving out.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Enough. Enough. Oh, stop!

A VOICE

On White Pile, twenty to one!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Seeing* CHANTECLER'S *bleeding neck.*] He bleeds, oh!

A HEN

[*Rising on tiptoe behind the* GOLDEN PADUA COCK.] I should like to see the blood!

THE WHITE PILE

[*Increasing the fury of his onset.*] I'll have your gizzard!

THE HEN

[*Trying to see.*] The Padua Cock's hat shuts off my view!

THE BLACKBIRD

Hats off!

A VOICE

That was a stinger! On his comb!

SHRILL CRIES

[*From the crowd.*] Land him one! Do him up! Lay him out! Have his gore!

PATOU

[*Standing up in his wheelbarrow.*] Will you stop behaving like human beings?

CRIES

[*Furiously keeping time with the blows showering upon* CHANTECLER.] In the neck! On the nut! On the wing! On the —— [*Sudden silence.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Amazed.*] What is this? The ring breaks up, the shouting dies —— [*He looks around. The* WHITE PILE *has drawn away and backed against the hedge. A strange commotion agitates the crowd.* CHANTECLER, *exhausted,*

bleeding, tottering, does not understand, and murmurs.] What joke are they preparing against my end? [*And suddenly.*] Joy, Patou, joy!

PATOU

What?

CHANTECLER

I have done them an injustice. All of them, ceasing to insult and mock me, look, gather round me, closer and closer — look!

PATOU

[*Seeing them all, in fact, crowding around* CHANTECLER, *and gazing anxiously at the sky, looks up too, and says simply.*] It is the hawk!

CHANTECLER

Ah! [*A dark shadow slowly sweeps over the motley crowd, who crouch and cower.*]

PATOU

When that great shadow falls, it is not the fine, strange Cocks we trust to keep off the bird of prey!

CHANTECLER

[*Suddenly grown great of size, his wounds forgotten, stands in the midst of them, and in an authoritative tone.*] Yes, close around me, all of you, all! [*All, huddled in their feathers, their heads drawn in between their wings, press against him.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Dear, brave, and gentle heart!

[*The shadow sweeps over the crowd a second time. The* GAME COCK *makes himself small.* CHANTECLER *alone remains standing, in the midst of a heap of ruffled, trembling feathers.*]

A HEN

[*Looking up at the* HAWK.] Twice the black shadow has swept over us!

CHANTECLER

[*Calling to the* CHICKS, *who come madly running.*] Chicks, come here to me!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You take them under your wing?

CHANTECLER

I must. Their mother is a box!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking upward.*] He hovers over us —— [*The shadow of the* HAWK, *circling lower and lower, passes for the third time, darker than ever.*]

ALL

[*In a moan of fear.*] Ah!

CHANTECLER

[*Shouting toward the sky.*] I am here!

PATOU

He has heard your trumpet cry!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

He flies further.

[*All rise with a joyous cry of deliverance, "Ah!" and go back to their places to watch the end of the combat.*]

PATOU

Without loss of a moment they form the ring again.

CHANTECLER

[*With a start.*] What did you say? [*He looks. It is true, the ring has immediately formed.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Now they want you killed to be revenged for their fine scare.

CHANTECLER

But now I shall not be killed! I felt my strength come back when the common enemy flew across the sky. [*Striding boldly up to the* WHITE PILE.] I got back my courage, fearing for the others.

THE WHITE PILE

[*Amazed at being smartly attacked.*] Whence has he drawn new strength?

CHANTECLER

I am thrice stronger now than you. Black excites me, you see, as red excites the bull, and thrice I have stared at night in the form of a bird's shadow!

THE WHITE PILE

[*Driven to bay, against the hedge, prepares to use his razors.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Screaming.*] Look out! He has two sharp razors at his heels, the beast!

CHANTECLER

I knew it!

THE CAT

[*From his tree, to the* GAME COCK.] Use your knives!

PATOU

[*Ready to spring from his wheelbarrow.*] If he uses those, I'll strangle him, that's all!

THE CROWD

Oh!

PATOU

I will! Howl you never so loud!

THE WHITE PILE

[*Feeling himself lost.*] No help for it!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Closely watching him.*] He is getting one of his razors ready!

THE WHITE PILE

[*Striking with his sharp spur.*] Take that! Die! [*He utters a terrible cry, while* CHANTECLER, *avoiding the blow, springs aside.*] Ah! [*He drops to the ground. Cry of amazement.*]

SEVERAL VOICES

What is it?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Who has hopped up to the fallen* COCK *and examined*

him.] Nothing! Merely he has dexterously slashed his left claw with his right!

THE CROWD

[*Following and hooting the* WHITE PILE, *who, having picked himself up, limps off.*] Hoo! Hoo!

PATOU *and the* PHEASANT-HEN

[*Laughing and weeping and talking, all in one, beside* CHANTECLER, *who stands motionless, utterly spent, with closed eyes.*] Chantecler! It is we! The Pheasant-hen! The Dog! Speak to us, speak!

CHANTECLER

[*Opening his eyes, looks at them and says gently.*] The day will rise to-morrow!

SCENE SIXTH

THE SAME, *except the* WHITE PILE

THE CROWD

[*After seeing the* WHITE PILE *off, return tumultuously to* CHANTECLER, *hailing him with acclamations.*] Hurrah!

CHANTECLER

[*Drawing away from them, in a terrible voice.*] Stand back! I know your worth! [*The crowd hastily draws back.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Close by his side.*] Come away to the woods, where true-hearted animals live!

CHANTECLER

No, I will stay here.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

After finding them out?

CHANTECLER

After finding them out.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You will stay here?

CHANTECLER

Not for their sakes, but the sake of my song. It might spring forth less clear from any other soil! But now, to inform the Day that it is sure to be called to-morrow, I will sing! [*Obsequious movement of the crowd, attempting to approach.*] Back! All of you! I have nothing left but my song! [ALL *draw away, and alone in his pride, he begins.*] Co —— [*To himself, stiffening himself against pain.*] Nothing left but my song, therefore let us sing well! [*He tries again.*] Co—— Now, I wonder, shall I take it as a chest-note, or — Co — a head-note? Shall I count one-three, or — Co — And the accent? Since they filled my head with all that sort of thing, I — Coocooroo — Keekee-ree —— And the theory? The dynamic theory? Cock-a —— I am all tangled up in schools and rules and rubbish! If he reduced his flight to a theory, what eagle would ever soar? Co —— [*Trying again, and ending in a raucous, abortive crow.*] Co —— I cannot sing any more, I, whose method was not to know how, but

be quite certain why! [*In a cry of despair.*] I have nothing left! They have taken everything from me, my song and everything else. How shall I get it back?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Opening her wings.*] Come away to the woods!

CHANTECLER

[*Falling upon her breast.*] I love you!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

To the woods, where the simple birds sing their sweet unconscious songs!

CHANTECLER

Let us go! [*Both go toward the back.* CHANTECLER *turning.*] But there is one thing I wish to say ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Trying to lead him away.*] Come to the woods!

CHANTECLER

—— to all the Guineahennery gathered beneath these arbors. Let the garden — the Bees agree with me, I fancy! — let the garden work untroubled at changing its blossoms into fruit ——

BUZZING OF BEES

We agree — ee — ee!

CHANTECLER

Nothing good is ever accomplished in the midst of noise. Noise prevents the bough ——

BUZZING

[*Further off.*]

So say we — e — e! we — e — e!

CHANTECLER

—— from bringing its apple to perfection, prevents the grape ——

BUZZING

[*Dying away among the foliage.*]

So say we — e — e!

CHANTECLER

—— from ripening on the vine. [*Going toward the back with the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Let us go! [*Turning and coming again angrily toward the front.*] But I wish furthermore to say to these H —— [*The* PHEASANT-HEN *lays her wing across his beak.*] —— ens that those unnatural Cocks will lightly take themselves away, back to the gilded mangers of their sole affection, the moment they hear the cry of Chick-chick-chick-chick-chick! [*Imitating a servant girl calling* CHICKENS *to feed.*] For all those charlatans are stalking appetites, and nothing more!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Trying to lead him off.*] Come! Come!

A HEN

She is eloping with him.

CHANTECLER

I am coming! But —— [*Coming forward again.*] I must first say to this Peacock, in the presence of that Addlepate —— [*Indicating the* GUINEA-HEN.]

THE GUINEA-HEN

He insults me in my own house. Sensational!

CHANTECLER

False hero whom Fashion has taken for leader, you walk in such terror of appearing behindhand to the eyes of your own tail that your throat is blue with it! But, urged forward, on and on, by every staring eye upon it, you will fall at last, breathless for good and all, and end in the false immortality bestowed, false artist, by the —— [*Imitating the manner of the* PEACOCK.] shall I say bird-stuffer?

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Mechanically.*] Yes!

CHANTECLER

No. Taxidermist, — to use the word you would prefer. That, my dear Peacock, is what I wished to say.

THE BLACKBIRD

Bang!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning toward him.*] As for you ——

THE BLACKBIRD

Fire away!

CHANTECLER

I will! You became acquainted one grey morning with a city sparrow, did you not tell us so? That was your ruin. You have been possessed ever since with the desire to appear like one yourself.

THE BLACKBIRD

But ——

CHANTECLER

From that hour, unresting, acting the sparrow night and day, the sparrow even in sleep, self-condemned to play the sparrow without respite, you have appeared — a famous jay!

THE BLACKBIRD

But ——

CHANTECLER

Pathetic effort of a country birdkin, twisting his thick bill to talk with a city accent! Ah, you wish to bite off bits of slang? My friend, they are green! Every grape you pick breaks in your jaws, for city grapes are glass bubbles! Having taken from the sparrow only his make-up and grimace, you are just a clumsy understudy, a sort of vice-buffoon! And you serve up stale old cynicisms picked up with crumbs in fashionable club-rooms, poor little bird, and think to astonish us with your budget of scandalous news ——

THE BLACKBIRD

But ——

CHANTECLER

I have not exhausted my ammunition! You wish to imitate the sparrow? But the sparrow does not, slyly and meanly mischievous, make a cult of sprightliness, is not funny with authority, is not the pedant of flippancy! You percher among low bushes, who never care to fly, you wish to imitate —— [*Turning to one of the exotic* COCKS *cackling behind him.*] Silence, Cock of Japan! or I shall spoil a picture!

THE JAPANESE COCK

[*Hurriedly.*] I beg your pardon!

CHANTECLER

[*Continuing to the* BLACKBIRD.] You wish to imitate the sparrow, who, rising on light wing, underlines his words with a telegraph wire! Very well, I hate to grieve you, but — you know I can hear the sparrows when they come to steal my corn! — you are not in it, you do not pull it off. Your lingo is a fake!

THE BLACKBIRD

A ——?

CHANTECLER

And your performance is a shine!

THE BLACKBIRD

He can talk slang?

CHANTECLER

I can talk anything! — It's the Paris article made in Germany!

THE BLACKBIRD

But ——

CHANTECLER

Fire away, I think you said. I hope you don't mind my air-gun?

THE BLACKBIRD

I ——

CHANTECLER

The Grand Master of Illuminations is entirely at your service. What do you say?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Hastily.*] Nothing! [*He tries to get away.*]

CHANTECLER

You wish to ape the sparrow of city streets! But his impudence is not a manner of prudence, an art of remaining vague, an elegant method of having no opinion. His eyes always express either wrath or delight. Do you care to know the secret by which the little beggar, with his "Chappie" and his "See" can steal away our hearts? It is that he is frank and fearless, that he believes, that he loves, that the railings of a balcony where some child strews crumbs for him are the only cage he ever knew! It is that one can be sure of his gaiety of soul, since he is gay when he is hungry! But you who, void of gaiety because void of love, have imagined that evil wit can take the place of good humour, and that one can play the sparrow when he is a sleek and vulgar trimmer, sniggering behind his wing, what I say to you is, "Guess again, Mock-sparrow, guess again!"

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Always applauding everything that is said at her receptions.*] Good! That was extremely good!

A CHICKEN

[*To the crestfallen* BLACKBIRD.] You will make him smart for this?

THE BLACKBIRD

[*Prudently.*] No. I will take it out on the Turkey.

[*At this point a* VOICE *calls,* "*Chick-chick-chick-chick-*

chick!" and all the FANCY COCKS, *rushing toward the irresistible call to food, hurry out, tumbling over one another in their haste.*]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Running after them.*] Are you going?

A PADUA COCK

[*The last to leave.*] I beg to be excused! [*Disappears.*]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*In the midst of the hubbub.*] Are you going? Must you go? Oh, don't go yet!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Come, my golden Pheasant!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Running to* CHANTECLER.] Are you running away?

CHANTECLER

To save my song!

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*Running to the* YOUNG GUINEA-COCK.] My son, I am in such a state — I am in such ——

A HEN

[*Calling after* CHANTECLER.] And when shall we see you again?

CHANTECLER

[*Before going.*] When you have grown teeth! [*Off with the* PHEASANT-HEN.]

THE GUINEA-HEN

[*To the* YOUNG GUINEA-COCK.] This has been quite the finest affair of the season! [*Darting madly about among the departing guests.*] Au revoir! Mondays in August! Don't forget!

THE MAGPIE

[*Announcing.*] The Tortoise!

ACT IV

ACT FOURTH

THE NIGHT OF THE NIGHTINGALE

In the Forest. Evening. Huge trees with thick gnarled roots. At the base of one of the trees, Time or a lightning stroke has hollowed a sort of chamber. Rising slopes carpeted with heather. Rabbit holes. Mosses. Toadstools. Stretched between two ferns, a great cobweb, spangled with water-drops. At the rise of the curtain, RABBITS *are discovered on every side among the underbrush, peacefully inhaling the evening air. A time of serene silence and coolness.*

SCENE FIRST

A RABBIT *in front of his burrow,* CHOIR OF UNSEEN BIRDS.

A RABBIT

It is the hour when with sweet and solemn voices the two warblers, Black-cap of the Gardens, and Red-wing of the Woods, intone the evening prayer.

A VOICE

[*Among the branches.*] O God of Birds!

ANOTHER VOICE

O God of Birds! or, rather, for the Hawk
Has surely not the same God as the Wren,
O God of Little Birds!

A THOUSAND VOICES

[*Among the leaves.*] O God of Little Birds!

FIRST VOICE

Who breathed into our wings to make us light,
And painted them with colours of His sky,
All thanks for this fair day, for meat and drink —
Sweet sky-born water caught in cups of stone,
Sweet hedgerow berries washed of dust with dew.

And thanks for these good little eyes of ours
That spy the unseen enemies of man,
And thanks for the good tools by Thee bestowed
To aid our work of little gardeners,
Trowels and pruning-hooks of living horn.

THE SECOND VOICE

To-morrow we will fight borer and blight,
Forgive Thy birds to-night their trespasses,
The stripping of a currant-bush or two!

THE FIRST VOICE

Breathe on our bright round eyes and over them
The triple curtain of the lids will close.
If Man, the unjust, pay us by casting stones,
For filling field and wood and eaves with song,
For battling with the weevil for his bread,
If he lime twigs for us, if he spread snares,
Call to our memory Thy gentle Saint,
Thy good Saint Francis, that we may forgive
The cruelty of men because a man
Once called us brothers, "My brothers, the birds!"

THE SECOND VOICE

Saint Francis of Assisi ——

A THOUSAND VOICES

[*Among the leaves.*] Pray for us!

THE VOICE

Confessor of the mavis ——

ALL THE VOICES

Pray for us!

THE VOICE

Preacher to the swallows ——

ALL THE VOICES

Pray for us!

THE VOICE

O tender dreamer of a generous dream,
Who didst believe so surely in our soul
That, ever since, our soul, and ever more,
Affirms, defines itself ——

ALL THE VOICES

Remember us!

THE FIRST VOICE

And by the favour of thy prayers obtain
The needful daily sup and crumb! Amen.

THE SECOND VOICE

Amen!

ALL THE VOICES

[*In a murmur spreading to the uttermost ends of the forest.*] Amen!

CHANTECLER

[*Who, having a moment before stepped from the hollow tree, has stood listening.*] Amen!

[*The shade has deepened and taken a bluer tinge. The spiderweb, touched by a moonbeam, looks as if sifting*

silver dust. The PHEASANT-HEN *comes from the tree and follows* CHANTECLER *with little short feminine steps.*]

SCENE SECOND

CHANTECLER, *the* PHEASANT-HEN, *from time to time the* RABBITS, *now and then the* WOODPECKER.

CHANTECLER

How softly sleeps the moonlight on the ferns! Now is the time ——

A LITTLE QUAVERING VOICE

Spider at night,
Bodeth delight!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Thanks, kind Spider!

CHANTECLER

Now is the time ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Close behind him.*] Now is the time to kiss me.

CHANTECLER

All those Rabbits looking on make it a trifle ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Suddenly flaps her wings; the frightened* RABBITS *start, on all sides white tails disappear into rabbit-holes. The*

PHEASANT-HEN *coming back to* CHANTECLER.] There! [*They bill.*] Do you love my forest?

CHANTECLER

I love it, for no sooner had I crossed its verdant border than I got back my song. Let us go to roost. I must sing very early to-morrow.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Imperiously.*] But one song only!

CHANTECLER

Yes.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

For a month I have only allowed you one song.

CHANTECLER

[*Resignedly.*] Yes.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And has the Sun not risen just the same?

CHANTECLER

[*In a tone of unwilling admission.*] The Sun has risen.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You see that one can have the Dawn at a smaller cost. Is the sky any less red for your only crowing once?

CHANTECLER

No.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Well then? [*Offering her bill.*] A kiss! [*Finding his kiss absent-minded.*] You are thinking of something else. Please attend! [*Reverting to her idea.*] Why should you wear yourself out? You were simply squandering the precious copper of your voice. Daylight is all very well, but one must live! Oh! the male creature! If we were not there, with what sad frequency he would be fooled!

CHANTECLER

[*With conviction.*] Yes, but you are there, you see.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

It is barbarous anyhow to keep up a perpetual cockaduddling when I am trying to sleep.

CHANTECLER

[*Gently correcting her.*] Doodling, dearest.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Duddling is correct.

CHANTECLER

Doodling.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Raising her head toward the top of the tree and calling.*] Mr. Woodpecker! [*To* CHANTECLER.] We will ask the learned gentleman in the green coat. [*To the* WOODPECKER, *the upper half of whose figure appears at a round hole high up in the tree trunk; his coat is green, his waistcoat buff, and he wears a red skull-cap.*] Do you say cockaduddling or cockadoodling?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Bending a long professorial bill.*] ' Both.

CHANTECLER *and the* PHEASANT-HEN

[*Turning to each other, triumphantly.*] Ah!

THE WOODPECKER

Duddling is more tender, doodling more poetic. [*He disappears.*]

CHANTECLER

It is for you I cockaduddle!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Yes, but you cockadoodle for the Dawn!

CHANTECLER

[*Going toward her.*] I do believe you are jealous!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Retreating coquettishly.*] Do you love me more than her?

CHANTECLER

[*With a cry of warning.*] Be careful, a snare!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Jumping aside.*] Ready to spring!

[*Dimly visible against a tree, is, in fact, a spread bird-net.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Examining it.*] A dangerous contrivance.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Forbidden by the game-laws of 44.

CHANTECLER

[*Laughing.*] Do you know that?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You seem to forget that the object of your affections comes under the head of game.

CHANTECLER

[*With a touch of sadness.*] It is true that we are of different kinds.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Returning to his side with a hop.*] I want you to love me more than her. Say it's me you love most. Say it's me!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Reappearing.*] I!

CHANTECLER

[*Looking up.*] Not in a love-scene.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To the* WOODPECKER.] See here, — you! Be so kind another time as to knock!

WOODPECKER

[*Disappearing.*] Certainly. Certainly.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER.] He has a bad habit of thrusting his bill between the bark and the tree, but he is a rare scholar, exceptionally well informed ——

CHANTECLER

[*Absent-mindedly.*] On what subjects?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The language of birds.

CHANTECLER

Indeed?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

For, you know, the birds when they say their prayers speak the common language, but when they chat together in private they use a twittering dialect, wholly onomatopoetic.

CHANTECLER

They talk Japanese. [*The* WOODPECKER *knocks three times with his bill on the tree: Rat-tat-tat!*] Come in!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Appearing, indignant.*] Japanese, did you say?

CHANTECLER

Yes. Some of them say, Tio! Tio! and others say Tzoui! Tzoui!

THE WOODPECKER

Birds have talked Greek ever since Aristophanes!

CHANTECLER

[*Rushing to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Oh, for the love of Greek! [*They bill.*]

THE WOODPECKER

Know, profane youth, that the Black-chat's cry Ouis-ouis-tra-tra, is a corruption of the word Lysistrata! [*Disappears.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER.] Will you never love anyone but me?

[THE WOODPECKER'S *knock is heard: Rat-tat-tat.*]

CHANTECLER

Come in!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To* CHANTECLER.] Do you promise?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Appears, soberly nodding his red cap.*] Tiri-para! sings the small sedge-warbler to the reeds. Incontrovertibly from the Greek. *Para*, along, and the word water is understood. [*Disappears.*]

CHANTECLER

He has Greek on the brain!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Reverting to her idea.*] Am I the whole, whole world to you?

CHANTECLER

Of course you are, only ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

In my green-sleeved Oriental robe, I look to you — how do I look?

CHANTECLER

Like a living commandment ever to worship that which comes from the East.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Exasperated.*] Will you stop thinking of the light of day, and think only of the light in my eyes?

CHANTECLER

I shall never forget, however, that there was a morning when we believed equally in my Destiny, and that in the radiant hour of dawning love you forgot, and allowed me to forget, your gold for the gold of the Dawn!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The Dawn! Always the Dawn! Be careful, Chantecler, I shall do something rash! [*Going toward the back.*]

CHANTECLER

You will infallibly do as you like.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

In the glade not long ago I met the —— [*She catches herself and stops short, intentionally.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Looks at her, and in an angry cry.*] The Pheasant? [*With sudden violence.*] Promise me that you will never again go to the glade!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Assured of her power over him, with a bound returns to his side.*] And you, promise that you will love me more than the Light!

CHANTECLER

[*Sorrowfully.*] Oh!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

That you will not sing ——

CHANTECLER

More than one song, we have settled that point. [*Rat-tat-tat, from the* WOODPECKER.] Come in!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Appearing and pointing with his bill at the net.*] The snare! The farmer placed it there. He declared he would capture the Pheasant-hen.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

He flatters himself!

THE WOODPECKER

And that he would keep you on his farm.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Indignant.*] Alive? [*To* CHANTECLER, *in a tone of reproach.*] Your farm!

CHANTECLER

[*Seeing a* RABBIT *who has returned to the edge of his hole.*] Ah, there comes a Rabbit!

THE RABBIT

[*Showing the snare to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] You know if you put your foot on that spring ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a tone of superiority.*] I know all about snares, my little man. If you put your foot on that spring, the thing shuts. I am afraid of nothing but dogs. [*To*

CHANTECLER.] On your farm, which you secretly yearn for.

CHANTECLER

[*In a voice of injured innocence.*] I?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*To the* RABBIT, *giving him a light tap with her wing to send him home.*] Afraid of nothing but dogs. And since you put me in mind of it, I think I must go and perplex their noses, by tangling my tracks all among the grass and underwoods.

CHANTECLER

That's it, you go and fool the dogs!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Starts off, then returns.*] You are homesick for that wretched old farm of yours?

CHANTECLER

I? I? [*She goes off. He repeats indignantly.*] I? [*Watching her out of sight, then, dropping his voice, to the* WOODPECKER.] She is not coming back, is she?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Who from his high window in the tree can look off.*] No.

SCENE THIRD

CHANTECLER, THE WOODPECKER.

CHANTECLER

[*Eagerly.*] Keep watch! They are going to talk with me from home.

THE WOODPECKER

[*Interested.*] Who?

CHANTECLER

The Blackbird.

THE WOODPECKER

I thought he hated you.

CHANTECLER

He came near it, but the Blackbird cast of mind admits of compromise, and it amuses him to keep me informed.

THE WOODPECKER

Is he coming?

CHANTECLER

[*Who is a different bird since the* PHEASANT-HEN'S *exit, light-hearted, boyishly cheerful.*] No, but the blue morning-glory opening in his cage amid the wistaria, communicates by subterranean filaments with this white convolvulus trembling above the pool. [*Going to the convolvulus.*] So that by talking into its chalice —— [*He plunges his bill into one of the trembling milky trumpets.*] Hello!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Nodding to himself.*] From the Greek, *allos*, another. He talks with another.

CHANTECLER

Hello! The Blackbird, please!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Keeping watch.*] Most imprudent, this is! To choose among the convolvuli exactly the one which ——

CHANTECLER

[*Lighter and lighter of mood, returning to the* WOODPECKER.] But it's the only one open all night! When the Blackbird answers, the Bee who sleeps in the flower wakes up and we ——

THE BEE

[*Inside the convolvulus.*] Vrrrrrrrrr!

CHANTECLER

[*Briskly running to the flower and listening at the horn-shaped receiver.*] Ah? This morning, did you say?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Filled with curiosity.*] What is it?

CHANTECLER

[*In a voice of sudden emotion.*] Thirty chicks have been born! [*Listening again.*] Briffaut, the hunting-dog, is ill? [*As if something interfered with his hearing.*] I believe it is the Dragon-flies, deafening us with the crackling of their wings ——[*Shouting.*] Will you be so kind, young ladies, as not to cut us off? [*Listening.*] And big Julius obliges Patou to go with him on his hunting expeditions? [*To the* WOODPECKER.] Ah, you ought to know my friend Patou! [*Burying his bill again in the flower.*] So? Without me everything goes wrong? Yes! [*With satisfaction.*] Yes! Waste and carelessness, naturally!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Who has been keeping watch, warns him suddenly under breath.*] Here she comes!

CHANTECLER

[*With his bill in the flower.*] Indeed?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Fluttering desperately.*] Hush!

CHANTECLER

The Ducks spent the night under the cart, did they?

THE WOODPECKER

Pst!

SCENE FOURTH

THE SAME, THE PHEASANT-HEN

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Who has come upon the scene, with a threatening gesture at the* WOODPECKER.] Go inside! [*The* WOODPECKER *precipitately disappears. She stands listening to* CHANTECLER.]

CHANTECLER

[*In the convolvulus, more and more deeply interested.*] You don't mean it! What, all of them? — Yes? — No? — Oh! — Well, well! — Is that so?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Who has timidly come back, aside.*] Oh, that an ant of the heaviest might weigh down his tongue!

CHANTECLER

[*Talking into the flower.*] So soon? The Peacock out of fashion?

THE WOODPECKER

[*Trying to get* CHANTECLER'S *attention behind the* PHEASANT-HEN'S *back.*] Pst!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Turning around, furious.*] You! — You had better! [*The* WOODPECKER *alertly retires, bumping his head.*]

CHANTECLER

[*In the flower.*] An elderly Cock? — I hope that the Hens ——? [*With intonations more and more expressive of relief.*] Ah, that's right! that's right! that's right! [*He ends, with evident lightening of the heart.*] A father! [*As if answering a question.*] Do I sing? Yes, but far away from here, at the water-side.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Oh!

CHANTECLER

[*With a tinge of bitterness.*] Golden Pheasants will not long allow one to purchase glory by too strenuous an effort, and so I go off by myself, and work at the Dawn in secret.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Approaching from behind with threatening countenance.*] Oh!

CHANTECLER

As soon as the beauteous eye which enthralls me ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Pausing.*] Oh!

CHANTECLER

—— closes, and in her surpassing loveliness she sleeps ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Delighted.*] Ah!

CHANTECLER

I make my escape.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Furious.*] Oh!

CHANTECLER

I speed through the dew to a distant place, to sing there the necessary number of times, and when I feel the darkness wavering, when only one song more is needed, I return and noiselessly getting back to roost, wake the Pheasant-hen by singing it at her side. — Betrayed by the dew? Oh, no! [*Laughing.*] For with a whisk of my wing I brush my feet clear of the tell-tale silveriness!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Close behind him.*] You brush your ——?

CHANTECLER

[*Turning.*] Ouch! [*Into the convolvulus.*] No, nothing! I — Later! — Ouch!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Violently.*] So! So! Not only you keep up an interest in the fidelity of your old flames ——

CHANTECLER

[*Evasively.*] Oh!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You furthermore ——

CHANTECLER

I ——

THE BEE

[*Inside the morning-glory.*] Vrrrrrrr!

CHANTECLER

[*Placing his wing over the flower.*] I ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You deceive me to the point of remembering to brush off your feet!

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

This clodhopper, see now, whom I picked up off his haystack — and to rule alone in his soul is apparently quite beyond my power!

CHANTECLER

[*Collecting himself and straightening up.*] When one dwells in a soul, it is better, believe me, to meet with the Dawn there, than with nothing.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Angrily.*] No! the Dawn defrauds me of a great and undivided love!

CHANTECLER

There is no great love outside the shadow of a great dream! How should there not flow more love from a soul whose very business it is to open wide every day?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Coming and going stormily.*] I will sweep everything aside with my golden russet wing!

CHANTECLER

And who are you, bent upon such tremendous sweeping? [*They stand rigid and erect in front of each other, looking defiance into each other's eyes.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The Pheasant-hen I am, who have assumed the golden plumage of the arrogant male!

CHANTECLER

Remaining in spite of all a female, whose eternal rival is the Idea!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a great cry.*] Hold me to your heart and be still!

CHANTECLER

[*Crushing her brutally to him.*] Yes, I strain you to my Cock's heart —— [*With infinite regret.*] Better it were I had folded you to my Awakener's soul!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

To deceive me for the Dawn's sake! Very well, however much you may abhor it, you shall for my sake deceive the Dawn.

CHANTECLER

I? How?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Stamping her foot; in a capricious tone.*] It is my formal and explicit wish ——

CHANTECLER

But listen, dear ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

My formal and explicit wish that you should for one whole day refrain altogether from singing.

CHANTECLER

That I ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I desire you to remain one whole day without singing.

CHANTECLER

But, heavens and earth, am I to leave the valley in total darkness?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Pouting.*] What harm will it do to the valley?

CHANTECLER

Whatever lies too long in darkness and sleep becomes used to falsehood and consents to death.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Leave singing for one day —— [*In a tone of evil insinuation.*] It will free my mind of certain suspicions troubling it.

CHANTECLER

[*With a start.*] I can see what you are trying to do!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And I can see what you are afraid of!

CHANTECLER

[*Earnestly.*] I will never give up singing.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And what if you were mistaken? What if the truth were that Dawn comes without help from you?

CHANTECLER

[*With fierce resolution.*] I shall not know it.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a sudden burst of tears.*] Could you not forget the time, for once, if you saw me weeping?

CHANTECLER

No, I could not.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Nothing, ever, can make you forget the time?

CHANTECLER

Nothing. I am conscious of darkness as too heavy a weight.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

You are conscious of darkness as — Shall I tell you the truth? You think you sing for the Dawn, but you sing in reality to be admired, you — songster, you! [*With contemptuous pity.*] Is it possible you are not aware that your poor notes raise a smile right through the forest, accustomed to the fluting of the thrush?

CHANTECLER

I know, you are trying now to reach me through my pride, but ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I doubt if you can get so many as three toadstools and a couple of sassafras stalks to listen to you, when the ardent oriole flings across the leafy gloom his melodious pir-piriol!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Reappearing.*] From the Greek: Pure, *puros.*

CHANTECLER

No more from you, please! [*The* WOODPECKER *hurriedly withdraws.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Insisting.*] The echo must make some rather interesting mental reservations, one fancies, when he hears you sing after hearing the great Nightingale!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning to leave.*] My nerves, my dear girl, are not of the very steadiest to-night.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Following.*] Did you ever hear him?

CHANTECLER

Never.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

His song is so wonderful that the first time —— [*She stops short, struck by an idea.*] Oh!

CHANTECLER

What is it?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Aside.*] Ah, you feel the weight of the darkness ——

CHANTECLER

[*Coming forward again.*] What?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*With an ironical curtsey.*] Nothing! [*Carelessly.*] Let us go to roost! [CHANTECLER *goes to the back and is preparing to rise to a branch. The* PHEASANT-HEN *aside.*] He does not know that when the Nightingale sings one listens, supposing it to be a minute, and lo! the whole night has been spent listening, even as happens in the enchanted forest of a German legend.

CHANTECLER

[*As she does not join him, returns to her.*] What are you saying?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Laughing in his face.*] Nothing!

A VOICE

[*Outside.*] The illustrious Cock?

CHANTECLER

[*Looking around him.*] I am wanted?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Who has gone in the direction from whence came the voice.*] There, in the grass! [*Jumping back.*] Mercy upon us! They are the —— [*With a movement of insuperable disgust.*] They are the —— [*With a spring she conceals herself in the hollow tree, calling back to* CHANTECLER.] Be civil to them!

SCENE FIFTH

CHANTECLER, *the* PHEASANT-HEN, *hidden in the tree, and the* TOADS.

A BIG TOAD

[*Rearing himself in the grass.*] We have come ——

[*Other* TOADS *become visible behind him.*]

CHANTECLER

Ye gods, how ugly they are!

THE BIG TOAD

[*Obsequiously.*] —— in behalf of all the thinking contingency of the Forest, to the author of so many songs —— [*He places his hand on his heart.*]

CHANTECLER

[*With disgust.*] Oh, that hand spread over his paunch!

THE BIG TOAD

[*With a hop toward* CHANTECLER.] —— at once novel, ——

ANOTHER TOAD

[*Same business.*] Pellucid!

ANOTHER

[*Same business.*] Succinct!

ANOTHER

[*Same business.*] Vital!

ANOTHER

[*Same business.*] Pure!

ANOTHER

[*Same business.*] Great!

CHANTECLER

Gentlemen, pray be seated. [*They seat themselves around a large toadstool.*]

THE BIG TOAD

True, we are ugly ——

CHANTECLER

[*Politely.*] You have fine eyes.

THE BIG TOAD

[*Raising himself by bearing with both hands upon the rim of the toadstool.*] But, Knights of this fungoid Round Table, we desire to do homage to the Parsifal who has given to the world a sublime song ——

SECOND TOAD

A true song!

THE BIG TOAD

And a celestial!

THIRD TOAD

And a no less terrestrial!

THE BIG TOAD

[*With authority.*] A song by comparison with which the song of the Nightingale sinks into insignificance!

CHANTECLER

[*Astonished.*] The Nightingale's song?

SECOND TOAD

[*In a tone of finality.*] Is not a circumstance to yours!

THE BIG TOAD

[*With a hop.*] It was high time that a new singer ——

ANOTHER

[*Same business.*] And a new song ——

FIFTH TOAD

[*Quickly, to his neighbour.*] And a song by a stranger ——

THE BIG TOAD

Came to change conditions here.

CHANTECLER

Ah, I shall change conditions?

ALL

Glory to the Cock!

CHANTECLER

I do not see that the forest thinks so poorly of me after all!

THE BIG TOAD

Played out, the Nightingale!

CHANTECLER

[*More and more surprised.*] Really?

SECOND TOAD

More and more his song confesses itself effete ——

THE BIG TOAD

Mawkish!

THIRD TOAD

Null!

FOURTH

[*Contemptuously.*] And his old-fashioned pretense of of inspiration!

FIFTH TOAD

And the name he has adopted: Bul-bul!

ALL THE TOADS

[*Puffing with laughter.*] Bul-bul!

THE BIG TOAD

This is the way he goes on: [*Parodying the song of the* NIGHTINGALE.] Tio! Tio!

SECOND TOAD

His solitary idea is an old silver trill copied from the bubbling spring. [*He imitates in grotesque fashion the singing of the* NIGHTINGALE.] Tio! Tio!

CHANTECLER

But ——

THE BIG TOAD

[*Quickly.*] Do not attempt, you, the Renovator of Art, to defend that ancient high authority on sentimental gargling!

SECOND TOAD

That superannuated tenor quavering out his cavatinas to the glory of minor poetry and the edification of fogydom!

THIRD TOAD

The Harp that twanged through Tara's hall, and insists on twanging still!

CHANTECLER

[*Indulgently.*] But why should he not, after all, if he enjoys it?

THE BIG TOAD

Endeavouring to impose on a suffering and surfeited public the musty old fashion of ingenious fioritura!

CHANTECLER

Audiences nowadays, of course, look for a different sort of thing.

THIRD TOAD

Your song has exposed the artificiality of his.

ALL

[*In an explosion.*] Down with Bul-bul!

CHANTECLER

[*Whom the* TOADS *have gradually surrounded.*] Gentlemen and honored Batrachians, my voice, it is true, gives forth natural notes ——

THE BIG TOAD

Yes, notes which lend us wings ——

CHANTECLER

[*Modestly.*] Oh!

ALL

[*Waggling their bodies as if about to fly.*] Wings!

THE BIG TOAD

Their secret being that they sing Life!

CHANTECLER

That is true.

SECOND TOAD

Yes, my dear fellow, Life!

CHANTECLER

[*With careless complacency.*] My crest for that reason is flesh and blood!

ALL THE TOADS

[*Clapping their little hands.*] Good, very good!

THE BIG TOAD

That formula is a programme.

SECOND TOAD

Since we are assembled around a table, why should we not offer to the Chief ——

CHANTECLER

[*Modestly, hanging back from the suggested honour.*] Gentlemen ——

SECOND TOAD

—— to the Chief of whom we stood in notable need, a banquet?

ALL

[*Beating enthusiastically upon the toadstool.*] A banquet!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking out from the tree.*] What is the matter?

CHANTECLER

[*In spite of all, rather flattered.*] A banquet!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Slightly ironical.*] Shall you accept?

CHANTECLER

You see, my dear — the new tendencies — Art, — the thinking contingency of the Forest —— [*Indicating the* TOADS.] Yes, I have lent wings to —— [*In a light and careless tone.*] It's all up with the Nightingale, you see. Musty old method! Antiquated trill! This is the way he goes on —— [*To the* TOADS.] How was it you said he went on?

ALL THE TOADS

[*Comically.*] Tio! Tio!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN, *with pitying indulgence.*] He goes on like this: Tio! Tio! And I believe I need not scruple to accept ——

A VOICE

[*In the tree above him breaks forth in a long note, limpid, and heart-moving*] Tio! [*Silence.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Startled, raising his head.*] What was that?

THE BIG TOAD

[*Quickly, visibly embarrassed.*] Nothing! It is he!

THE VOICE

[*Slowly and wonderfully, with the sigh of a soul in every note.*] Tio! Tio! Tio! Tio!

CHANTECLER

[*Turning upon the* TOADS.] Scum of the earth!

THE TOADS

[*Backing away from him.*] What ——?

SCENE SIXTH

THE SAME, *the* NIGHTINGALE *unseen, and little by little all the* FOREST CREATURES.

THE NIGHTINGALE

[*From the tree, in his emotionally throbbing voice.*] Tiny bird, lost in the darkness of the tree, I feel myself turning into the heart-beat of the infinite night!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* TOADS.] And you have dared ——

THE NIGHTINGALE

Hushed lies the ravine beneath the magic of the moon ——

CHANTECLER

—— to compare my rude singing with that divine voice? Scum of the earth! Toads! And I never divined that they were doing to him here what was done to me over yonder!

THE BIG TOAD

[*Suddenly swelling to a great size.*] Toads! Yes, as it happens, we are Toads!

THE NIGHTINGALE

Vapour of pearl wreathes the summits in an ethereal veil ——

THE BIG TOAD

[*Self-appreciatively.*] We are Toads, certainly, magnificently embossed with warts! [*All rear themselves up, swollen, standing between* CHANTECLER *and the tree.*]

CHANTECLER

And I perceived not, I who have never known envy, to what venomous feast I was bidden!

THE NIGHTINGALE

What matter? Sooner or later, you, the strong, and I, the tender, we were fated, despite all the Toads in the world, to understand each other!

CHANTECLER

[*With religious fervour.*] Sing!

A TOAD

[*Who has hastily dragged himself to the tree in which the* NIGHTINGALE *is singing.*] Let us clasp the bark with our slimy little arms, and slaver upon the foot of the tree! [*All crawl toward the tree.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Trying to stop one of them who is clumsily hopping.*] But are you not yourself gifted with a singing voice of exceptional purity?

THE TOAD

[*In a tone of sincerest suffering.*] I am, but when I hear somebody else singing, I can't help it, — I see green! [*He joins his companions.*]

THE BIG TOAD

[*Working his jaws as if chewing something which foamed.*] There foam up beneath our tongues I know not what strange soapsuds, and —— [*To his neighbour.*] Are you frothing?

THE OTHER

I am frothing.

ANOTHER

He is frothing.

ALL

We are frothing.

A TOAD

[*Tenderly laying his arm about the neck of a dilatory* TOAD.] Come and froth!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* NIGHTINGALE.] But will they not trouble and prevent your mellifluent song?

THE NIGHTINGALE

In no wise. I will take their refrain into my song ——

THE BIG TOAD

[*Patting a little* TOAD *on the head to encourage him.*] Don't be afraid, go ahead, — froth!

THE TOADS

[*All together, at the base of the tree to which they form a crawling, writhing girdle.*]

The Toads, croak! croak! the Toads are we!

THE NIGHTINGALE

—— And make of both a Villanelle!

THE TOADS

We welter in malignity!

THE NIGHTINGALE

The while they fume beneath my tree
I fill with song the enchanted dell ——

THE TOADS

The Toads, croad! croak! the Toads are we!

[*And the Villanelle proceeds, sung by the alternate voices, one of which, ever higher and more enraptured, carries the song proper, and the others, ever angrier and lower, the burden of the song.*]

THE NIGHTINGALE *and* THE TOADS, *alternately*

I sing! for Wind, that harper free,
And music bubbling from the well —
— We welter in malignity! —

And fragrance floating from the lea,
Of meadow-sweet and pimpernel —
— The Toads, croak! croak! the Toads are we! —

And Luna showering ecstasy,
All weave so wonderful a spell —
— We welter in malignity! —

Its melting magic moveth me
The secret of my heart to tell!
— The Toads, croak! croak! the Toads are we! —

Within my heart all sympathy,
Within mine eye all visions dwell —
— We welter in malignity! —

Life, Death, I turn to rhapsody,
Who am the deathless Philomel!
— The Toads, croak! croak! the Toads are we,
Who welter in malignity!

CHANTECLER

Beside those heavenly pipes, ah, me! my voice is Punchinello's squeak! Sing on! Sing on! The Croakers are in retreat.

THE TOADS

[*Retreating, overcome by the conquering song.*] Croak! croak!

CHANTECLER

Their fate to seethe in the cauldron of a witch! But you, the creatures of the forest come to slake the thirst of their hearts at your song. See them creeping to the lure ——

THE TOADS

[*From the underbrush.*] Croak! croak!

CHANTECLER

A doe, look! tiptoeing on delicate hoofs, followed by a wolf who has forgotten to be a wolf ——

THE TOADS

[*Lost among the grass.*] Croak!

CHANTECLER

The squirrel steals down from the lofty tree-tops. The whole vast forest is stirred by a thrill of brotherliness.

THE TOADS

[*Out of sight.*] —— roak!

CHANTECLER

The echo alone now repeats ——

FAINT DISTANT VOICE

——oak!

CHANTECLER

Gone! Gone are the Toads!

[*Music holds the night: a song without words, delicate volleys of rapturous notes.*]

CHANTECLER

The Glow-worms have lighted their small, green lamps. All that is good comes forth, while hate shrinks back to its lair. Now they that shall be eaten lay themselves down in the grass by the side of them that shall eat them. The Star of a sudden looks nearer to earth, and forsaking her web the Spider draws herself up toward your song, climbing by her own silken thread.

ALL THE FOREST

[*In a moan of ecstasy.*] Ah!

[*And the forest lies as if under a spell; the moonlight is softer, the tender green fire of the glow-worm shines blinking among the moss; on all sides, between the tree-boles creep, shadow-like, the charmed beasts; eyes shine, moist muzzles point toward the source of the music. The* WOODPECKER *stands at his bark window, dreamily nodding; all the* RABBITS, *with up-pricked ears, sit at their earthen doors.*]

CHANTECLER

When he sings thus without words, what is he sing. ing, Squirrel?

THE SQUIRREL

[*From a tree-top.*] The joy of swift motion.

CHANTECLER

And what say you, Hare?

THE HARE

[*In the coppice.*] The thrill of fear!

CHANTECLER

You, Rabbit?

ONE OF THE RABBITS

The Dew!

CHANTECLER

You, Doe?

THE DOE

[*From the depths of the woods.*] Tears!

CHANTECLER

Wolf?

THE WOLF

[*In a gentle distant howl.*] The Moon!

CHANTECLER

And you, Tree with the golden wound, singing Pine?

THE PINE-TREE

[*Softly beating time with one of its boughs.*] He tells me that my drops of resin in the form of rosin will sing upon the bows of violins!

CHANTECLER

And you, Woodpecker, what does he say to you?

THE WOODPECKER

[*In ecstasy.*] He says that Aristophanes ——

CHANTECLER

[*Promptly interrupting him.*] Never mind! I know! You, Spider?

THE SPIDER

[*Swinging at the end of one of her threads.*] He sings of the raindrop sparkling in my web like a royal gift.

CHANTECLER

And you, Drop of Water, sparkling in her web?

A LITTLE VOICE

[*From the cobweb.*] Of the Glow-worm!

CHANTECLER

And you, Glow-worm?

A Little Voice

[*In the grass.*] Of the Star!

Chantecler

And you, if one may so far presume as to question you, of what does he sing to you, Star?

A Voice

[*In the sky.*] Of the Shepherd!

Chantecler

Ah, what fountain is it ——

The Pheasant-Hen

[*Who is watching the horizon between the trees.*] The darkness is lightening.

Chantecler

What fountain, in which each finds water for his thirst? [*Listening with greater attention.*] To me he speaks of the Day, which arises and shines at my song!

The Pheasant-Hen

[*Aside.*] And speaks of it so eloquently that for once you will forget it!

Chantecler

[*Noticing a* Bird *who having come a little way out of the thicket is beatifically listening.*] And how do you, Snipe, translate his poem?

The Snipe

I don't know. I only know I like it — It is sweet!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Who is not lured — she! — into forgetting to watch the sky between the branches, aside.*] The night is wearing away!

CHANTECLER

[*To the* NIGHTINGALE, *in a discouraged voice.*] To sing! To sing! But how, after hearing the faultless crystal of your note, can I ever be satisfied again with the crude, brazen blare of mine?

THE NIGHTINGALE

But you must!

CHANTECLER

Shall I find it possible ever again to sing? My song, alas, must seem to me always after this too brutal and too red!

THE NIGHTINGALE

I have sometimes thought that mine was too facile, perhaps, and too blue!

CHANTECLER

Oh, how can you humble yourself to make such a confession to me?

THE NIGHTINGALE

You fought for a friend of mine, the Rose! Learn, comrade, this sorrowful and reassuring fact, that no one, Cock of the morning or evening Nightingale, has quite the song of his dreams!

CHANTECLER

[*With passionate desire.*] Oh, to be a sound that soothes and lulls!

THE NIGHTINGALE

To be a splendid call to duty!

CHANTECLER

I make nobody weep!

THE NIGHTINGALE

I awaken nobody! [*But after the expression of this regret, he continues in an ever higher and more lyrical voice.*] What matter? One must sing on! Sing on, even while knowing that there are songs which he prefers to his own song. One must sing, — sing, — sing, — until —— [*A shot. A flash from the thicket. Brief silence, then a small, tawny body drops at* CHANTECLER'S *feet.*]

CHANTECLER

[*Bending and looking.*] The Nightingale! — The brutes! [*And without noticing the vague, earliest tremour of daylight spreading through the air, he cries in a sob.*] Killed! And he had sung such a little, little while! [*One or two feathers slowly flutter down.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

His feathers!

CHANTECLER

[*Bending over the body which is shaken by a last throe.*] Peace, little poet!

[*Rustling of leaves and snapping of twigs; from a thicket projects* PATOU'S *shaggy head.*]

SCENE SEVENTH

THE SAME, PATOU, *emerging for a moment from the brush.*

CHANTECLER

[*To* PATOU.] You! [*Reproachfully.*] You have come to get him?

PATOU

[*Ashamed.*] Forgive me! The poacher compels me ——

CHANTECLER

[*Who had sprung before the body, to protect it, uncovers it.*] A Nightingale!

PATOU

[*Hanging his head.*] Yes. The evil race of man loves to shower lead into a singing tree.

CHANTECLER

See, the burying beetle has already come.

PATOU

[*Gently withdrawing.*] I will make believe I found nothing.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Watching the day break.*] He has not noticed that night is nearly over.

CHANTECLER

[*Bending over the grasses which begin to stir about the dead bird.*] Insect, where the body has fallen, be swift to come and open the earth. The funereal necrophaga are the only grave-diggers who never carry the dead elsewhere, believing that the least sad, and the most

fitting tomb, is the very clay whereon one fell into the final sleep. [*To the funeral insects, while the* NIGHTINGALE *begins gently to sink into the ground.*] Piously dig his grave! Light lie the earth upon him!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Aside, looking at the horizon.*] Over there ——

CHANTECLER

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Bul-bul to-night shall see the Bird of Paradise!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Aside.*] The sky is turning white! [*A whistle is heard in the distance.*]

PATOU

[*To* CHANTECLER.] I will come back. He is whistling me. [*Disappears.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Restlessly dividing her attention between the horizon and the* COCK.] How can I conceal from him —— [*She moves tenderly toward* CHANTECLER, *opening her wings so as to hide the brightening East, and taking advantage of his grief.*] Come and weep beneath my wing! [*With a sob he lays his head beneath the comforting wing which is quickly clapped over him. And the* PHEASANT-HEN *gently lulls him, murmuring.*] You see that my wing is soft and comforting! You see ——

CHANTECLER

[*In a smothered voice.*] Yes!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Gently rocks him, darting a glance now and then over her shoulder to see how the dawn is progressing.*] You see that a wing is an outspread heart —— [*Aside.*] Day is breaking! [*To* CHANTECLER.] You see that—— [*Aside.*] The sky has paled! [*To* CHANTECLER.] —— that a wing is —— [*Aside.*] The tree is steeped in rosy light! [*To* CHANTECLER.] —— partly a shield, and partly a cradle, partly a cloak and a place of rest, — that a wing is a kiss which enfolds and covers you over. You see that —— [*With a backward leap, suddenly withdrawing her wings.*] the Day can break perfectly well without you!

CHANTECLER

[*With the greatest cry of anguish possible to created being.*] Ah!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Continuing inexorably.*] That the mosses in a moment will be scarlet!

CHANTECLER

[*Running toward the moss.*] Ah, no! No! Not without me! [*The moss flushes red.*] Ungrateful!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The horizon ——

CHANTECLER

[*Imploringly, to the horizon.*] No!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

—— is glowing gold!

CHANTECLER

[*Staggering.*] Treachery!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

One may be all in all to another heart, you see, one can be nothing to the sky!

CHANTECLER

[*Swooning.*] It is true!

PATOU

[*Returning, cheery and cordial.*] Here I am! I have come to tell you that they are all mad over there, at the topsy-turvy farm, to have back the Cock who orders the return of Day!

CHANTECLER

They believe that now I have ceased to believe it!

PATOU

[*Stopping short, amazed.*] What do you mean?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Bitterly pressing close to* CHANTECLER.] You see that a heart pressing against your own is better than a sky which does not in the very least need you.

CHANTECLER

Yes!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

That darkness after all may be as sweet as light if there are two close-clasped in the shade.

CHANTECLER

[*Wildly.*] Yes! Yes! [*But suddenly leaving her side he raises his head and in a ringing voice.*] Cock-a-doodle-doo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Taken aback.*] Why are you crowing?

CHANTECLER

As a warning to myself, — for thrice have I denied the thing I love!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

And what is that?

CHANTECLER

My life's work! [*To* PATOU.] Up and about! Come, let us go!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

What are you going to do?

CHANTECLER

Follow my calling.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But what night is there for you to rout?

CHANTECLER

The night of the eyelid!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Pointing toward the growing glory of the dawn.*] Very well, you will rouse sleepers ——

CHANTECLER

And Saint Peter!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But can you not see that Day has risen without the benefit of your crowing?

CHANTECLER

I am more sure of my destiny than of the daylight before my eyes.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Pointing at the* NIGHTINGALE *who has already half disappeared into the earth.*] Your faith can no more return to life than can that dead bird.

[*From the tree above their heads suddenly rings forth the heart-stirring, limpid, characteristic note: Tio! Tio!*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Struck with amazement.*] Is it another singing?

PATOU

[*With quivering ear.*] And singing still better, if possible.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Looking up in a sort of terror at the foliage, and then down at the little grave.*] Another takes up the song when this one disappears?

THE VOICE

In the forest must always be a Nightingale!

CHANTECLER

[*With exaltation.*] And in the soul a faith so faithful that it comes back even after it has been slain.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But if the Sun is climbing up the sky?

CHANTECLER

There must have been left in the air some power from my yesterday's song.

[*Flights of noiseless grey wings pass among the trees.*]

THE OWLS

[*Hooting joyfully.*] He kept still!

PATOU

[*Raising his head and looking after them.*] The Owls, fleeing from the newly risen light, are coming home to the woods.

THE OWLS

[*Returning to their holes in the old trees.*] He kept still!

CHANTECLER

[*With all his strength come back to him.*] The proof that I was serving the cause of light when I sang is that the Owls are glad of my silence. [*Going to the* PHEASANT-HEN, *with defiance in his mien.*] I make the Dawn appear, and I do more than that!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Choking.*] You do ——

CHANTECLER

On grey mornings, when poor creatures waking in the twilight dare not believe in the day, the bright copper of my song takes the place of the sun! [*Turning to go.*] Back to our work!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

But how find courage to work after doubting the work's value?

CHANTECLER

Buckle down to work!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*With angry stubbornness.*] But if you have nothing whatever to do with making the morning?

CHANTECLER

Then I am just the Cock of a remoter Sun! My cries so affect the night that it lets certain beams of the day pierce through its black tent, and those are what we call the stars. I shall not live to see shining upon the steeples that final total light composed of stars clustered in unbroken mass; but if I sing faithfully and sonorously, and if, long after me, and long after that, in every farmyard its Cock sings faithfully, sonorously, I truly believe there will be no more night!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

When will that be?

CHANTECLER

One Day!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Go, go, and forget our forest!

CHANTECLER

No, I shall never forget the noble green forest where I learned that he who has witnessed the death of his

dream must either die at once or else arise stronger than before.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*In a voice which she does her best to make insulting.*] Go and get into your hen-house by the way of a ladder.

CHANTECLER

The birds have taught me that I can use my wings to go in.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Go and see your old Hen in her old broken basket.

CHANTECLER

Ah, forest of the Toads, forest of the Poacher, forest of the Nightingale, and of the Pheasant-hen, when my old peasant mother sees me home again, back from your green recesses where pain is so interwoven with love, what will she say?

PATOU

[*Imitating the* OLD HEN'S *affectionate quaver.*] How that Chick has grown!

CHANTECLER

[*Emphatically.*] Of course she will! [*Turning to leave.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

He is going! When faithless they turn to leave, oh, that we had arms, arms to hold them fast, — but we have only wings!

CHANTECLER

[*Stops short and looks at her, troubled.*] She weeps?

PATOU

[*Hastily, pushing him along with his paw.*] Hurry up!

CHANTECLER

[*To* PATOU.] Wait a moment.

PATOU

I am willing. Nothing can sit so patiently and watch the dropping of tears as an old dog.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Crying to* CHANTECLER, *with a leap toward him.*] Take me with you!

CHANTECLER

[*Turns and in an inflexible voice.*] Will you consent to stand second to the Dawn?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Fiercely drawing back.*] Never!

CHANTECLER

Then farewell!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I hate you!

CHANTECLER

[*Already at some distance among the brush.*] I love you, but I should poorly serve the work to which I devote myself anew at the side of one to whom it were less than the greatest thing in the world! [*He disappears.*]

SCENE EIGHTH

THE PHEASANT-HEN, PATOU, *later the* WOODPECKER, RABBITS, *and all the* VOICES *of the awakening forest.*

PATOU

[*To the* PHEASANT-HEN.] Mourn!

THE SPIDER

[*In the centre of her web which now sifts the gold dust of a sunbeam.*]

Spider at morn,
Cometh to warn!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Furiously, tearing down the cobweb with a brush of her wing.*] Be still, hateful Spider! Oh, may he perish for having disdained me!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Who from his window has been watching* CHANTECLER'S *departure, suddenly, frightened.*] The poacher has seen him!

THE OWLS

[*In the trees.*] The Cock is in danger!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Leaning out to see better.*] He breaks his gun in two!

PATOU

[*Alarmed.*] To load it! Is that murderous fool in sheepskin gaiters going to fire upon a rooster?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Spreading her wings to rise.*] Not if he sees a pheasant!

PATOU

[*Springing before her.*] What are you doing?

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Following my calling! [*She flies toward the danger.*]

THE WOODPECKER

[*Seeing that in her upward swing she must touch the spring of the forgotten snare.*] Look out for the snare! [*Too late. The net falls.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Utters a cry of despair.*] Ah!

PATOU

She is caught!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Struggling in the net.*] He is lost!

PATOU

[*Wildly.*] She is — He is ——

[*All the* RABBITS *have thrust out their heads to see.*]

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Crying in an ardent prayer.*] Daybreak protect him!

THE OWLS

[*Rocking themselves gleefully among the branches.*] The gun-barrel shines, shines ——

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Dawn, touch the cartridge with your dewy wing! Trip the foot of the hunter in a tangle of grass! He is your Cock! He drove off the darkness and the shadow of the Hawk! And he is going to die. Nightingale, you, say something! Speak!

THE NIGHTINGALE

[*In a supplicating sob.*] He fought for a friend of mine, the Rose!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Let him live! And I will dwell in the farmyard beside the ploughshare and the hoe! And renouncing for his sake all that in my pride I made a burden and torment to him, I will own, O Sun, that when you made his shadow you marked out my place in the world!

[*Daylight grows. On all sides, rustles and murmurs.*]

THE WOODPECKER

[*Singing.*] The air is blue!

A CROW

[*Cawing as he flies past.*] Daylight grows!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

The forest is astir —

ALL THE BIRDS

[*Waking among the trees.*] Good-morning! Good-morning! Good-morning! Good-morning! Good-morning!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Everyone sings!

A JAY

[*Darting past like a streak of blue lightning.*] Ha, ha!

THE WOODPECKER

The Jay shakes with homeric laughter.

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Crying in the midst of the music of the morning.*] Let him live!

THE JAY

[*Again darting past.*] Ha, ha!

A CUCKOO

[*In the distance.*] Cuckoo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

I abdicate!

PATOU

[*Lifting his eyes heavenward.*] She abdicates!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

Forgive, O Light, to whom I dared dispute him! Dazzle the eye taking aim, and be victory awarded, O Sunbeams ——

THE JAY *and the* CUCKOO

[*Far away.*] Ha! Cuckoo!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

—— to your powder of gold —— [*A shot. She gives a sharp cry, ending in a dying voice.*] —— over man's black powder! [*Silence.*]

CHANTECLER'S VOICE

[*Very far away.*] Cock-a-doodle-doo!

ALL

[*In a glad cry.*] Saved!

THE RABBITS

[*Capering gaily out of their burrows.*] Let us turn somersets among the thyme!

A VOICE

[*Fresh and solemn, among the trees.*] O God of birds!

THE RABBITS

[*Stopping short in their antics stand abruptly still; soberly.*] The morning prayer!

THE WOODPECKER

[*Crying to the* PHEASANT-HEN.] They are coming to examine the trap!

THE PHEASANT-HEN

[*Closes her eyes in resignation.*] So be it!

THE VOICE IN THE TREES

God by whose grace we wake to this new day ——

PATOU

[*Before leaving.*] Hush! Drop the curtain! Men folk are coming! [*Off.*]

[*All the woodland creatures hide. The* PHEASANT-HEN *is left alone, and, held down by the snare, with spread wings and panting breast, awaits the approach of the giant.*]

CURTAIN

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